

# Battle For The Church **1517-1644**

An account of the epic struggle to recover  
the New Testament pattern of church life in England  
1517-1644

or

How the church in England was delivered from  
the gross darkness endured through twelve hundred years  
of Popery, brought into Puritanism  
and from thence to the rise of the Particular Baptists

1517-1644 were momentous years in the history of the church – from the break with Rome to the rise of the Particular Baptists. David Gay tells the moving story with clarity and passion. In these pages, the main characters are brought vividly to life. Many endured horrific sufferings – hunger, prison, torture and exile. Why? Because they wanted New Testament church life.

But they had powerful enemies – enemies who exacted a price in blood by means of branding iron, stake and hangman's noose. Even so, those believers who 'did not love their lives to the death' took up spiritual arms in the battle for the church. Trusting in God, by his grace they triumphed. This book traces the course of their life-and-death struggle.

But here you have far more than a list of facts. The author, who is a preacher, makes pointed application throughout. You may not always agree with his conclusions, but you will be made to think – and not only about events which took place 400 years ago. Many of today's churches are in a tragic condition, and must be reformed. What lessons can you learn from the past?

To

Andrew, Jonathan, Lydia, David, Chloe, Stephen, Thomas, Philip and Samuel  
with their Pipper's prayerful desire  
that they, too, will all take their place in the line of  
the men and women of whom the world is not worthy

**Battle  
For The  
Church  
1517-1644**

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**BRACHUS**

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are from the New King James Version

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The LORD is a man of war

Exodus 15:3

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity unto the obedience of Christ

2 Corinthians 10:3-5



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## *Note to the Second Edition*

Fourteen years have passed since my *Battle For The Church* first saw the light of day, and I now take the opportunity to make the work available to a wider public.

In re-setting the text, in addition to making certain necessary minor alterations and corrections, I have included a selection of my source references, listing them by chapter headings in a separate section near the end of the work. But I have omitted the two chapters (plus other material) which dealt more fully with the subject of baptism, since this material formed the core of my *Infant Baptism Tested*, which, in turn, led to my subsequent *Baptist Sacramentalism*. Those two volumes should be read in conjunction with this present work.

As readers who are familiar with my books well know, I owe a great debt of gratitude to Nigel Pibworth. Although Nigel played no direct part in either the original volume or this, I still pay tribute to him here. Why? Because, in 1997, seeing the copies of my work as they came off the press, I suffered a severe attack of cold feet about their distribution. I even contemplated pulping the entire edition. Nigel, coming to see me, took a copy of my book home with him. He read it, and was soon definite that I should distribute it. And he offered to help. So I may say that, in this regard (*and in this regard only* – at least as far as it concerns me and my work), he acted as John Owen to John Bunyan. If it had not been for Owen, Bunyan might well never have published *Pilgrim's Progress*! If Nigel had not been as strong and as decided as he was, the 1997 publication might well never have been distributed. But *he* was. And *it* was.

And the rest, as they say, is history. Not only were my gnawing and debilitating fears *not* realised, but I have been encouraged to produce other works. To say that I have enjoyed this privileged occupation these past fourteen years, is a prodigious under-statement. If no one else has benefited, I have. So, once again, I record my heartfelt thanks to my friend.

I also thank Paul Lucas for reading the manuscript of this edition, and for his many helpful and preceptive suggestions which saved me from making more blunders than I have. The errors that remain are, of course, entirely down to me.

In re-reading this work, I have been rebuked by my own words. And how! The occupation is a salutary experience, I can tell you. I have found, as so many before, that it is far easier to preach and write than it is to do. But, as

we know, God will judge our works as well as our words. A sobering thought, indeed.

Whether or not my books have any lasting value, whether or not God will be pleased to continue to use them, time alone will tell. Nevertheless, I send this present work out into the world with the prayerful concern that it might prove a blessing to many. I covet Abel's testimony. When 'my tongue lies silent in the grave', as soon it will, may it be said of me: 'He being dead still speaks' (Heb. 11:4).

## *Introduction*

Reader, before you begin, there is something I would like you to understand. I want you to know what this book is not!

I do not pretend that my book is a learned treatise on church history, nor have I set out to produce a volume that is the last word on the subject. My purpose is far more modest, much less ambitious than that. Yet, perhaps, for a great many, far more useful simply because it is so modest.

Nor do I claim that my book is the fruit of original research. My debt to previous and better writers will be obvious to you, but often I do not acknowledge this as I go along because it would give the impression that I have tried to write an ‘academic’ book, and this is the last thing I want. I do not have the ability, in any case. But I do pay the warmest tribute to those who have laboured in this field before me. Without their efforts this volume would never have seen the light of day. In addition, I have supplied a list of my sources for those who wish to explore the subject in more detail. In this connection, it will be self-evident that I have not written with the idea of producing source material for authors. I have tried to be accurate, of course, but I respectfully ask those who wish to take the work further to consult original sources for themselves.

I have no illusions about the volume in your hands. I realise that I merely tell a tale which has been told before; but, I fear, a tale which has been largely forgotten. I have tried to give a simple but interesting account of a very important period in church history. In truth, the story is far more than ‘interesting’. It is thrilling and moving. And this is what I have tried to capture. I hope you find that I have succeeded, at least to a measure.

But wait a minute, do I hear you say? Church history... can that be interesting... thrilling? History! Why should I want to know about history?

Well... what is the answer to that? Why should present-day Christians want to know about the history of the church? Why should we bother our heads over the quarrels of far-off days, quarrels which some might say would be better forgotten? Should we not be up-to-date, getting on with living the Christian life now? Should we not be interested in the future, not the past? Why spend time looking back?

The answer is very clear. First and foremost, Christians must be interested in church history because God commands us to be interested in it. In his word, he speaks to us very often about his dealings with his people in past ages, and we are commanded and encouraged to keep alive the memory of his works. For example, the Hebrews were commanded to teach their children the facts and the significance of the history of God’s dealings with them (Exod. 12:26-27 and Josh. 4:6-7). Then again, when

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God was about to revive his people, and at other times (1 Sam. 10:18), he would remind them of his dealings with them in the past (Judg. 6:7-10; 1 Kings 18:36, for instance). Above all, we have the history of the early church recorded by the Holy Spirit in the Acts. I do not want to make this Introduction far too long, so I content myself with the mere reference to just a few passages from the Bible and let them speak for themselves:

We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what deeds you did in their days, in days of old... (Ps. 44:1).

I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times... I will remember the works of the LORD; surely I will remember your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all your work, and talk of your deeds (Ps. 77:5,11-12).

I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength and his wonderful works that he has done... (Ps. 78:2-4).

I remember the days of old; I meditate on all your works; I muse on the work of your hands (Ps. 143:5).

One generation shall praise your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts... All your works shall praise you, O LORD, and your saints shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and talk of your power, to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom (Ps. 145:4,10-12).

Surely the Bible teaches us that if, as Christians, we show no interest in church history then we are really saying that we are not interested in God's works. And so, if we show no interest in the history of the church, we are being disobedient to the commands of God's word. And apostasy is around the corner. The Hebrews failed to keep God's works in mind, with grievous results. We are warned about it:

We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers... did not understand your wonders; they did not remember the multitude of your mercies, but rebelled... they soon forgot his works... they forgot God their Saviour, who had done great things... wondrous works... awesome things... Therefore he said that he would destroy them... (Ps. 106:6-7,13,21-23).

When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which he had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers... (Judg. 2:10-12).

Note the connection: 'When... then' ...

There is another answer to that question, Why should we spend time looking back? It is this: Without doubt that is the very thing which Christians must always be doing! We should always be looking back,

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should we not? Yes! Looking back to the Bible. The answer to every question in Christianity – yes, every question – whether of doctrine or duty, is found in the Scriptures, and only there. If a man is not looking back, in this sense, then he cannot be a Christian at all!

Very reasonably it might be objected that in this book I am only looking back four hundred years. But this would be a superficial comment. The fact is the men and women I write about wanted to reform the church in their generation. Why? And in what way did they want it changed? From what? To what? And how did they hope to change it? The one answer to all those questions was, and is, by going back to the New Testament. *They* were looking back! Times without number they referred their enemies to the Scriptures and the practice of the New Testament churches. But they turned back to *Scripture*, I stress. They did not look to tradition, custom or the Fathers. They did not trust the dreams and visions of the mystics. They did not go to the pagans for their ideas. No! They looked back to the Bible. This is what Christians must always do. And that is part of my purpose in writing this book. Reader, I am not only interested in the mere history of the church – I want to do what I can to take you back to the New Testament.

Nevertheless, the question remains: Why study this particular period of church history? Why should we be so interested in the events which took place, largely in England, during the years 1517-1644?

The point is, in 1517 nearly all the church throughout Europe, and in England in particular, was shackled in slavery to Rome and held in gross darkness. And yet just over a century later the scene was very, very different. Instead of one massive State Church – the Papacy – there were countless, separate, independent churches in all of Europe. Instead of a universal Church membership based on infant baptism and the citizenship of a particular country, many of these separate churches were formed out of baptised believers only; that is, those men and women who gave a credible witness that they were regenerate and who had obeyed Christ by baptism upon profession of their faith.

In other words, in 1517 the Church in England was a gross distortion of the revealed pattern and had become a monstrosity; whereas by the middle of the next century a glorious reformation had taken place. I freely admit that the separate churches were far from perfect, but they were so much closer to the New Testament order than the Papacy – it is not too much to say that a transformation had taken place which was little short of the miraculous.

Surely this is a story worthy to be recorded? I go further and say that it is sinful to neglect it.

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Then again, the consequences which followed from the struggle to recover the New Testament church in England during this period were very far-reaching. And not only for England. The Low Countries, for instance, were affected very much by the events which took place in these islands during this time. But not only Holland – all Europe was transformed. What is more, the modern history of Massachusetts, then New England in general, and eventually of all America, was formed out of the events which I write about. Who has not heard of the *Mayflower* and the Pilgrim Fathers? There can be no doubt about it – we ought to know something about these matters.

But why *Battle For The Church*?

I have called this book a record of a *Battle* because that is what took place, a battle for the church. The history of this period is not a mere political or social history. The one hundred and fifty years in question were not simply a time of exploration or trade or increased learning. The issue which was at stake during this period – *the issue* – was the church. Consequently, the history I write about is supremely an account of the struggle to regain New Testament church life in England.

And what a struggle it was! For more than a thousand years England had been shrouded in gross darkness, the darkness of the Papacy. The biblical church of Jesus Christ had been all but obliterated, not only in England but throughout the world. Yet during the 16th and 17th centuries, godly men and women were prepared to take up spiritual arms in a spiritual battle, even a battle to the death, to recover the New Testament teaching about the church. Now nothing could be more important than this. No! Not in the 1590s (read on!); nor in the opening decades of the 21st century. I am convinced that it is still a vital matter. Until the end of the age it will be so. One of the sad marks of the spiritual decline in our generation is that very often the church is not given her rightful place in the thinking of Christians. Frequently the church is no longer thought of in New Testament terms and many have largely departed from the revealed pattern. Some do not realise it – and some do not even care.

The truth is, the battle for the reformation of the church is not over. Just because I leave off my tale in 1644 I do not mean to give the impression that I think the history of the church stopped at that point. I do not pretend for a minute that the churches in 1644 had reached a state of perfection. The battle went on. It is still raging. For this reason the study of church history is not mere theory, suitable only for the curious or those with antiquarian interests. Certainly not! Whereas the antiquarian buries himself in the past, lives in the past, and the historian examines it to try to explain the present, the Christian has far bigger concerns. He uses the past to

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benefit the future. The study of church history, therefore, is a most practical matter and of the utmost relevance for us today. In every age the church of Jesus Christ is under attack. Our generation is no exception. I want to do what I can to advance the cause of Christ, however small and feeble my effort might be. Hence this book.

I say again, a well-ordered church life is essential. I am of the same conviction as that expressed by Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his exposition of Ephesians 4:13. He wrote:

Nothing... is more important for us, as nothing was more important for these Ephesian Christians, than to understand this picture and conception of the... church which the apostle places before us. It is our failure as Christian people to understand what our church membership means – the dignity, the privilege, and the responsibility – that causes most of our troubles. Our greatest need is to recapture the New Testament teaching concerning the church. If only we could see ourselves in terms of it, we would realize that we are the most privileged people on earth, that there is nothing to be compared with being a Christian and a member of the mystical body of Christ...

It is failure to realize this, and the privilege and the glory that is involved, that leads to the miserable position in which many pastors and preachers have to appeal to (the) people to attend church on Sunday and to persuade them to do various duties in the church. Such people have never seen themselves as members of the body of Christ. They think that they are conferring an honour upon the church by being even loosely attached to her and honouring her with their fitful attendance.

It is because the church is of such importance, and because reform is urgently needed, that I have written as I have.

Since I shall say a great deal about the reform of the church, at this point I want to explain exactly what I mean by it, because I do not wish to mislead you. By the reform of the church I mean the need to get our churches as close as possible to the pattern, the order and the life of the New Testament churches. This involves two things – one positive and the other negative.

First the *positive*. We must cultivate all aspects of New Testament church life. I am convinced that the New Testament churches were composed of members who were regenerate and who were baptised after coming to faith. These members willingly submitted themselves to the constant care and rule of their appointed elders who regularly instructed them in the gospel; they enjoyed spiritual fellowship among themselves; they observed the Lord's supper in an orderly way; and they engaged in prayer – both in private, and in public at church prayer meetings. And every member was devoted to this spiritual activity; indeed they were strongly, even constantly, addicted to it. Further, the New Testament churches disciplined any members who fell short of the high standard. When churches as a

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whole became disorderly – the church at Corinth, for example – apostolic reproof and instruction reformed them. Finally, the New Testament churches suffered for their separation from the world; so much so, suffering must be regarded as an essential mark of a true church (2 Tim. 3:12). Although they enjoyed periods of respite (Acts 9:31), their general course was one of suffering and persecution. That is what I mean by the positive aspect of the reform of the church. Our churches must be like that. Many passages could be quoted to verify these claims.

Now for the *negative*. By the reform of the church, I mean that we must avoid in our churches (or remove from them) all the things that were not in the New Testament churches. As Christ cleansed the temple (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:14-17), so we must cleanse our churches – though in a spiritual way, of course. We must remove worship which is man-centred; it must be God-centred. We must get rid of entertainment and get back to proper scriptural instruction in our services. Spiritual fellowship must be restored in place of the social chit-chat and fun, the round of carnal activities or the mere consumption of food and drink which is so common today. Mature behaviour must replace childishness. There is a gross lack of discipline and much indifference in many churches; it must be put right. The Lord's supper is often lax in its observance and 'tacked-on' to another service as a kind of afterthought. If not that, more and more it is becoming a central part of an inclusive assembly at which both believers and unbelievers, adults and infants alike, are all free to partake in an indiscriminate way. Instead of its proper regulation, woolly announcements inviting 'all who love the Lord Jesus to sit down' are deemed sufficient. Sometimes not even that. Some churches do not even know who is at the supper (or who is not). This must be reformed. Many churches try to be popular, there is little or no cost in being a disciple, and steps are taken to make sure that sinners find the services bright, cheerful and attractive to their pagan appetites. There is a gross lack of commitment on the part of many members, prayer meetings and the like being poorly attended. All this must be put right. For these reasons I say that many churches are in a poor condition. I go as far as to ask, In some cases are they churches at all?

Let me say at once, I realise that excellent churches exist up and down the land, with fine ministers preaching the gospel in them. I also know that many churches and ministers are, sad to say, weary, frustrated and disappointed, especially seeing that the hopes many of us felt in the 1960s and 70s do not seem to have materialised. I assure you, I would not say a word to harm or grieve my brothers and sisters who labour valiantly for the cause of Christ. Indeed, I pray that God will bless and encourage them in his service. Nor do I confine my prayers and good wishes to those churches

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which agree with me on church order. Contrary to the impression some may draw from my book, I realise that God blesses his people in many different sorts of churches, and I hope my words may encourage the faithful saints in all of them.

But, on the other hand, I cannot close my eyes to what is plain to see. I dare not! Many churches are far from excellent; all that is called preaching is not real preaching of the highest calibre, no – not even in Reformed circles; the life of every church is not above reproach. While I would not grieve the weakest of Christ's faithful people, neither would I want to encourage those who play fast and loose with the gospel and the church to carry on in their sinful ways. There is a great deal which is wrong in many churches and it needs to be put right as a matter of desperate urgency. One great concern, to me at least, is that not a few imagine things have greatly improved over recent years, and are getting even better. Frankly, I disagree, and disagree strongly. Hence my censures listed above.

I know that these criticisms will horrify many. Some will be angry with me. With respect, I cannot help it. I have written this book because it is my conviction that the vast majority of churches desperately need reform. At any rate I have stated my view openly and honestly. It is for you, reader, to decide whether or not you wish to read on. But if you do, you know what my basic argument is. You know what to expect. I am appalled at the state of the generality of the churches, and I want to do what I can to advance their reform. I realise my effort is poor, but it is that which comes to hand. The woman received commendation from Jesus because, as he said: 'She has done what she could' (Mark 14:8). The lad could only give what he possessed, five barley loaves and two small fish – 'what are they?' Even so Jesus took and blessed them (John 6:9-14).

I know I am not alone in my 'alarmist' views. Listen to these words. Who do you think said them? Listen:

At this moment we have sin rampant among us almost beyond precedent... those who dare walk our streets after sundown tell us that Sodom, in its most putrid days, could scarce exceed (London) for open vice. To our infinite disgust and horror, the names of certain of the greatest in the land are at this hour openly mentioned in connection with the filthiest debauchery... it is a hideous evil that the dregs of vice should be the chosen luxury of certain of our hereditary legislators and rulers. Woe unto you, O land, when your great ones love the (brothel)!... This is not all: a general indifference to all religion is creeping over the country... Ask those who visit from door to door... and they will tell you that never before in their lifetime were there so few persons attendant upon the means of grace. The [Lord's day] is no longer a day of worship with millions. What continual efforts are made to rob us of [it]; to degrade it into a common workday... Today the revelation of God is treated with indifference, or talked of as if it deserved no reverence or credit. Unbelief has sapped the foundations of the social fabric. Worst of all – I must not hold

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back the charge – many of the avowed ministers of Christ are no ministers of faith at all, but promoters of unbelief. The modern pulpit has taught men to be infidels... Among those who are ordained to be preachers of the gospel of Christ, there are many who preach not faith but doubt, and hence they are servants of the devil rather than of the Lord. Think not that I am aiming at the Church of England... So frequently are the fundamental doctrines of the gospel assailed, that it becomes needful, before you cross the threshold of many a chapel, to ask the question: ‘Shall I hear the gospel here today...?’ I know I shall stir up a hornet’s nest by these honest rebukes but I cannot help it. I am burdened and distressed with the state of religion; a pest is in the air... No signs can be more alarming than the growing infidelity and worldliness which I see among those who call themselves Christians... Are we to see again unbelief and luxurious sin walking hand in hand? If so, there be some of us who mean to take up our sorrowful parable, and speak as plainly as we can for truth and holiness, whether we offend or please. Be it ours still to thunder out the law of God, and proclaim with trumpet clearness the gospel of Jesus...

The most remarkable point about that statement is this: It was not made by a contemporary of mine. It was said nearly one hundred and thirty years ago! Charles Haddon Spurgeon made the just complaint in a sermon in 1885 – what would he have to say if he were alive today and witnessed our massive spiritual decline over the past hundred years? The sand is near the bottom of the glass, and it is running out at an increasing rate.

Ah! but wait a minute, says someone, are you not guilty of breaking the commands of Romans 14:1-13? You judge, you criticise, you write against other Christians because they do things differently to you. And just because other believers do not see eye to eye with you, it does not mean they are wrong and you are right, you know. Who gave you the authority to criticise? Are you not breaking the commands of Romans 14?

The answer lies in that very passage; it defines the relevant matters as ‘doubtful things’ (Rom. 14:1). Literally, ‘decisions of reasonings’. The Greek word gives rise to our ‘dialogue’. It means reasoning, an opinion, questioning, hesitation, doubting, hence doubtful or disputable. In areas which are disputable, a matter of opinion, about which there is some doubt, where it is not absolutely certain one way or the other – in those areas, differences of judgement and practice must be allowed without censure. Especially is this so in the context of local church life. But obviously – even from a common sense point of view – in matters which are indisputable, no dispute is allowed, no deviation is possible. The question is: What are the matters which are indisputable? Clearly it is something which must be established very carefully and beyond doubt – it is vital to do so. How can we find out?

The answer is plain. Where God has spoken in his word, where he has made his mind known through revelation, there can be no dispute in such matters. God’s commands must be obeyed; God’s promises must be

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believed; God's declarations are the last word in all things. There can be no question about it. The whole structure of Christianity, its whole fabric, will tumble to the ground if this is not the case. It is the basis of Exodus 25:40 (Heb. 8:5); Isaiah 8:20; 1 Timothy 3:14-15; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 3:10 – 4:5; 2 Peter 3:16; Jude 3 *etc.* If this argument is not true, if it is not granted, there can be no Christian religion at all – at least, none which is worth the name.

My contention is that the things I have written about fall into this category. They are not doubtful matters. They belong to the things which have been revealed – the things which we must be careful to obey exactly. This book is about church life. I submit that church life, its pattern, its doctrine, its practice is spoken of very clearly in the New Testament. Church membership, baptism, the Lord's supper, prayer meetings, worship and all the rest are not disputable matters. They are not 'things indifferent'. Therefore, as a Christian and as preacher of the gospel, I have the right, I have the duty and the responsibility to exercise my judgement on these matters. I must examine the Scriptures and learn the mind of God on such questions. I must speak about them. I must speak the truth in love, I know (Eph. 4:15). But I must speak the truth as I see it. Nor is the truth something vague or indefinable. It is fixed. It is truth! It is not a lump of plasticine to be moulded, pulled and twisted about according to the whims and fancies of all and sundry. We must 'hold' the truth. It is not something intangible. It can be gripped. It has to be!<sup>1</sup>

What is more, if a preacher does not have the duty to discern, to distinguish and to make his convictions known in these matters, then we might just as well order a judge not to judge, a physician not to diagnose, an accountant not to audit or a detective not to investigate. And on the question of love – love to God and his truth comes before all other loves, does it not? At any rate, that is the approach I have tried to take in this book. I appreciate that my book may appear largely negative. I admit it. To explain myself: I have not set out to write a manual of biblical church life and order – there are many excellent books already written in that way and I can add nothing to them. What I have tried to do is to approach the subject from the other end, because when teaching it is necessary to say what is wrong in addition to saying what is right. Paul was often as negative as he was positive.

Reader, in the light of this, I want to *inform* you. I want to set out the facts of the period 1517-1644 in a simple and interesting way because I want to inform Christians who may not know much about them. I am grieved at the tragic ignorance of these stirring events among many

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<sup>1</sup> See Lloyd-Jones: *Studies* pp161-165.

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present-day Christians. To speak frankly – far too many believers are not aware of the tremendous debt of gratitude we owe to the saints who lived and died four hundred years ago. Our church liberty was obtained at great cost, even with the blood and tears of godly men and women. It is a sin that this is forgotten. We are throwing away our heritage. Be warned! What we do not value today, we will not have tomorrow! Rome is ever eager, watching and waiting. She is prepared to strike back. And to strike hard! We must be on our guard. New enemies are waiting. Islam for one. Foes unknown to us are already sharpening their swords. New atheists mushroom. I am sure that the battle for the church is going against us during these days, and badly so. The watchmen are dozing, well-nigh asleep on many ramparts. Some walls are totally undefended. In some cases, the enemies are invited in – and given the chief seats! It is tragic. It is atrocious. I want to do something about it. I want to remind present-day believers of the great events of four centuries ago.

My words may be thought harsh and rash. After I had written the bulk of the book, I was interested to read the following:

Rashness is a more agreeable failing than cowardice, and, when to speak is unpopular, it is less pardonable to be silent than to say too much. Posterity has, perhaps, as much to learn from the whirlwind eloquence with which Latimer scoured... as from the sober respectability of the judicious Paley.

To my mind, there is no comparison between the two. I suggest that the vast majority have never even heard of ‘the judicious Paley’. Too few have heard of Latimer! I want to do some good. Please forgive me if I have been rash at times and clumsy. You see, I did not want to fail by being guilty of ‘sober respectability’.

Generous reader, I ask you to forgive me for my blunt, unpolished style. Please do not refuse any good you may find in these pages just because I have put it badly. Please do not be affronted because I have spoken in every-day English. When I say stern things about the views of good men, and do so in vigorous terms, do not think that I am casting aspersions on their character. I am not! But if, in my opinion, the statements of good men are sometimes nonsensical, I have said as much. It does not mean I have no respect for the men in question. Moreover, if I am not allowed to express my own views then there seems little point in writing the book in the first place. Please do not think that I regard myself better than the good men I criticise on occasion. Nothing could be further from the truth.

When my manuscript was complete – for the umpteenth time! – I came across the published diaries of Kenneth Macrae. I was much encouraged by what I read. Macrae published a booklet in 1934 in which he wrote about the defection from the Reformed faith in Scotland, and he was greatly

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concerned that the Free Church would be caught up in the apostasy. Though he did not relish controversy, he felt duty-bound to do what he could to prevent the rise and spread of corruption and abominations in the churches. Hence his booklet. As publication drew near he recorded his feelings, saying: ‘I expect the book will make a bit of a stir and will make me the mark for many arrows, both without and within (the Free) Church, but the time for straight speaking has more than come’. Too big for my boots I may be, but this is exactly the way I feel about things today.

The editor of Macrae’s diaries included a quote from James Begg who, in his pamphlet *Anarchy in Worship* published in 1875, wrote:

At all times in the world, but especially in the church at the present day, there is nothing so lacking as moral courage. Few men comparatively think for themselves, and still fewer dare to say what they think, or act independently. They go in crowds, and simply float with the tide. They are most unwilling to hold their faces to any wind of opposition. As the tide brings in bits of cork and driftwood, and carries them out again, or leaves them high and dry, so it is with many modern Christians, and even with not a few Christian ministers. They quail before obloquy – cry for ‘open questions’, and terrified by the idea of fashion, fear every thing and every body except him whom they should fear.

It is my conviction that these words, true in 1875, are even more true these days.

In the light of what I wrote earlier, it will come as no surprise to read that I want to do more than inform you. I want to *stir* you and *challenge* you. Christians, awake! Not only is there a great deal of ignorance of church history today; there is a great deal of apathy and complacency about it. This is a grievous wrong. Christian, you are now in the front line of the battle for the church. Being a Christian means you are engaged in a war. The men and women I write about have long since gone to glory, many dispatched at the hands of savage persecutors. In their generation those godly people faced Satan himself and came to grips with him. It could be said of them:

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death (Rev. 12:11).

The words of Hebrews 10:32-34 may aptly be applied to them:

You endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you... joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

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It cannot be denied that the story I write of is similar to the account of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, and that the people concerned may properly be thought of as part of the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ which speak to us today.

The spiritual sword has been passed on to us. We are now in the thick of the battle for Christ’s church – in truth we are in the front line! These saints being dead still speak. I want to challenge you by writing about the way they stood their ground and did their duty. I have already said that I am a preacher, and it is as a preacher that I write – not as a historian nor an academic. I write to *move* you. Therefore I let you know right from the start, I am not content merely to record historical facts for your interest. No! I try to stir you up by application of those facts. The present times are far too dangerous, the truth far too precious, that I should write for mere historical or romantic interest. I have far more important work to do than that. There is something much more stern involved in this business than mere nostalgia or sentiment!

In connection with this question of preaching, I address you, reader, in this book, and I do so in a direct manner. I use the word *you*. I do not mean that I do not need the instruction because I have reached the standard, or that I am handing down laws from on high. Oh no! I am a hearer in addition to being a preacher. I have to read my own books, too.<sup>2</sup> I have to be the first hearer of my sermons. But, as a preacher, it is my responsibility to speak to those who listen to me, and to use the word *you*. It is the only way to preach. (See Acts 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 7:51-53 etc.). Preaching loses its power when preachers continue to speak in terms of *we* and *us*. It sounds more gracious, but it has lost much of its point. In truth, it then becomes lecturing and not preaching.

Again, you will find that various themes recur throughout these pages. I do not apologise for this – I frankly admit it. As I have just explained, I am a preacher, and preachers have to keep on reinforcing their teaching. The apostles felt the need for it. Peter said: ‘I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know them’ (2 Pet. 1:12) Paul could say that ‘to write the same things to you is not tedious’ (Phil. 3:1); and ‘I say (or testify) again’ (2 Cor. 11:16; Gal. 5:3); or ‘Again I will say’ (Phil. 4:4). ‘As we have said before, so now I say again’ (Gal. 1:9) comes the very next verse after he said it the first time. ‘I want to remind you’, said Jude (Jude 5). Do we not all feel the need of Hebrews 5:12 – ‘you need someone to teach you again’? The practice of the unrefined preacher is not so very far from the truth, after all. ‘First, I tells ’em what I’m going

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<sup>2</sup> As I said in the note to this edition, on re-reading my work, I have been rebuked. I do not publish this edition because I have reached the level God demands in his word. Far from it!

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to tell 'em; then I tells 'em; then I tells 'em what I've told 'em'. Perhaps more delicately put, but with the same point, are the words of the old preacher to the young Lloyd-Jones. 'I shall really be saying one thing, but I shall say it in three different ways'.

I have already said that the men and women I write about were not perfect; they made their mistakes. Certainly they did! Naturally all the churches they formed had their faults, and we must learn from them and avoid their mistakes. But having admitted their failures, it is only right and fair to state clearly that they tried to do much for God and his church. And with what success! Well might it be said of them:

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services! (Neh. 13:14).

We must remember these men and women and the good they did. And not only remember them. 'Go and do likewise' is their fitting epitaph. At the end of the book I shall ask you if you think *Battle For The Church* is a statement or an exhortation. Is it a record of facts, or is it a call to action?

Above all I want to write about these stirring events to the glory of God, not to the praise of the men and women involved. Of course not. They would be the first to say:

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to your name give glory (Ps. 115:1).

I do not want to elevate man. I want to lift up the name of Jehovah, the LORD our God, the one who enabled his people to accomplish so much.

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As I explained in the first edition, the substance of this book was first delivered as a series of addresses on church history in the Lowestoft Reformed Baptist church. I want to record my thanks to those who encouraged me by their enthusiasm on those Saturday nights in the winters of 1993-5. The preparation and delivery of the addresses was of immense value to my own soul at the time, which the subsequent writing of this book has increased immeasurably. I publish the result in the hope that it might prove to be a blessing to many others. I pray it may be so.

I acknowledge with thanks the help given to me by Chris and Eileen Baynham. My thanks, also, go to Joe Sheetz who read the original manuscript and made many valuable suggestions. In addition, I do appreciate the consideration shown to me by John Denman who read and

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commented on the chapters on baptism<sup>3</sup> from the point of view of one who held the opposite conviction to me. My late wife, Jean, gave invaluable help with the onerous task of meticulous reference checking and proofreading, and my son, Simon, saved me from countless blunders by his frank and fair comments on the manuscript. That being said, the responsibility for the book, of course, is entirely my own.

Some may be repelled by my use of the word *Papist* and connected terms. I have thought about this. I could have used *Roman Catholic*, but these two words are mutually exclusive, besides being a mouthful. *Catholic* is a misnomer when applied to the adherents of the See of Rome, and *Romanist* is as offensive to some as *Papist*. So I have kept to Papist. I know this is often a hostile term – and I frankly admit I abhor papal doctrines and claims. But as for hostility, what of *Lutheran*, *Protestant*, *Calvinist*, *Separatist*, *Semi-Separatist*, *Independent* or *Baptist*; were they and are they, even to this day, never used in a hostile way? It all depends on who says the word, and how. Why, *Christian* was probably a term of opprobrium when first used. Reader, may I respectfully ask you to understand that by Papist I mean, ‘an adherent of the pope, his claims and doctrines; an advocate of papal supremacy; a member of the Roman Catholic Church’. Such a use has a long pedigree; it dates from 1534.

In conclusion, I fully and unreservedly acknowledge my literary shortcomings. Besides which I have already made it clear that I am no historian. Nevertheless, in the following pages I have tried not to leap to unwarranted conclusions, nor read the present into the past. I have, however, been prepared to use the historical episodes to make application to present-day church life. Indeed, that is the reason why I have written the work!

Above all, I have tried to speak plainly and vigorously to the point. And with good reason: ‘For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?’ (1 Cor. 14:8).

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<sup>3</sup> As I have explained, these are omitted from this second edition. Please see my two volumes, *Infant Baptism Tested* and *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

## *The Distant Rumble of Battle*

There is a noise of war in the camp

Exodus 32:17

*Wittenberg, 1517 – the Elector's fear – Tetzel – Luther's resolve*

It is the 31st of October, 1517. Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony makes his final preparations for the great festival which he has arranged for tomorrow, All Saints Day. The festival will take place in his Church – the Castle Church at Wittenberg – the Church which Frederick has filled with precious relics. Why, he has even managed to obtain some pieces of the actual cross of Christ! And tomorrow... tomorrow... Frederick can picture it all. The relics will be carried out... with due solemnity, of course... paraded in public with massive pomp and show, to be set before the believing masses for their adoration. The precious, holy relics, so carefully collected on his instructions, will be adorned with twinkling gems, gleaming in gold and silver to be displayed before the eyes of the faithful. Oh yes, Frederick can picture it. The thronging crowds, all agog, dazzled by the splendour of the day. And it's to take place in Wittenberg... in his Church... in his town... under his patronage... He allows himself a little smile.

What is more... the faithful will not only be dazzled. No! For all who come to Wittenberg on All Saints Day, see the relics and confess their sins – will they not be given a large indulgence to take away with them? An indulgence? Yes, indeed. A certificate with the pope's own seal upon it; a certificate, guaranteed to reduce the punishment for sin, both in this life and in the next. Guaranteed! And by the pope himself!

Already the pilgrims are streaming into Wittenberg – hordes of the faithful have flocked to the town, all eager to set eyes upon the precious, holy objects. Have they not been assured that if they look upon the relics and confess their sins, an indulgence will be theirs? The pope himself has said so!

Happy pilgrims! Happy Frederick! He smiles again.

But slowly the smile fades, and his face grows dark... For Frederick is not altogether at ease on the Eve of All Saints. The truth is he cannot rest. He is disturbed and troubled in his mind. There is a fly in Frederick's ointment. It is that priest... that Dominican priest... Tetzel... he is in the region. Tetzel! The pest! For fifteen years now he has been a religious travelling salesman. Selling what? Selling indulgences, no less! The pope, Leo X, who lives in luxury and squanders vast sums of wealth, stands in

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particular need of ready cash at this time. He wishes to complete the project started by his predecessor and build a huge basilica topped with a massive dome to house the so-called remains of Peter and Paul in Rome, since the ancient wooden structure had been falling down and needed replacement. But lavish papal schemes have outrun the amount of money the popes are willing spend out of their own purse. Hence the selling of indulgences. Herein lies the root cause of Frederick's disturbance.

The trouble is... Frederick can picture Tetzel in his mind's eye. Tetzel in the pulpits of Saxony, Tetzel's wooden cross lifted high in front of the altar, the pope's banner and insignia dangling from it. Not only that, Frederick can hear Tetzel's thunderous voice booming over the congregation:

Indulgences are the most precious gifts of God. This wooden cross has as much efficacy as the cross of Jesus Christ himself. Come and I will give you letters furnished with seals, by which even the sins that you may wish to commit hereafter shall be forgiven you... there is no sin so great that an indulgence cannot remit it. Repentance is not necessary. Indulgences save not only the living, they save the dead also... Listen now, God and St Peter call you. Consider the salvation of your souls and those of your loved ones departed... Visit the most holy cross erected before you and ever imploring you... Listen to the voices of your dear dead relatives and friends beseeching you and saying: 'Pity us, pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for a pittance'. Do you not wish to? Open your ears. Hear the father saying to his son, the mother saying to her daughter: 'We bore you, nourished you, brought you up, left you our fortunes, and you are so cruel and hard that now you are not willing for so little to set us free. Will you let us lie here in flames? Will you delay our promised glory?' Remember that you are able to release them for the very instant the piece of money chinks at the bottom of the box, the soul is freed from purgatory and flies to heaven.

Frederick knows that in the confessional which follow, the faithful – rather, the duped! – will be told that in order to receive forgiveness for sin it is not necessary to be contrite nor even necessary to confess. Just give money. And be quick about it!

Yes, Frederick, Elector of Saxony is uneasy. His great festival of All Saints at Wittenberg will be ruined... ruined by Tetzel with his indulgence peddling. This Tetzel undermines the proper use of the traditional system of indulgences. Why can't something be done about it? Why can't he be stopped?

Nor is Frederick, Elector of Saxony, the only man in Wittenberg this day who is troubled by the gross scandal of Tetzel's trade in indulgences. Another man – one Martin Luther, monk, priest, theology lecturer and preacher – he also is greatly disturbed on the Eve of All Saints.

Luther has been appalled to have to listen to the excuses of those who have attended his preaching, when they have refused his calls for repentance. ‘Unless you repent you will all... perish’, he has warned. But the people have not listened. They would not! The people have refused him on the grounds that they do not have to abandon their sins. Why not? Because they have bought their indulgences from Tetzel! In vain has Luther declared that contrite sinners must ‘bear fruits worthy of repentance’. The people have no need of that kind of talk! The indulgences which they clutch so lovingly have effectively blocked their ears to the calls and warnings of Scripture.

Luther is determined to bring this scandal out into the open. His patience is exhausted. He will deal with this superstitious nonsense, this wicked traffic in indulgences. And he will deal with it once and for all. His mind is made up. There is a way open to him. The people have not listened to his preaching, as during his sermons in the past year he has urged caution over indulgences. According to Luther’s present thinking, indulgences could – perhaps – be used. But only in certain specified circumstances and under special conditions. These conditions have not been met in the particular case of Tetzel, whose abuse of the system has reached horrendous proportions. And Luther has preached about it. Nevertheless, the people have not heeded his warnings. Right! Enough is enough! He will resort to the usual means. He will call for an open debate on the matter. He will invite all and sundry to answer him in public dispute. He will force the issue to a head.

Luther makes his way through the throng to the Castle Church. He is determined and resolute. He nails a document to the north door of the building – a document which he has written out in Latin. It contains ninety-five theses or propositions. By nailing it to the Church door, he calls for a public disputation. He invites public debate with anyone and everyone on this matter of indulgences.

On this day, the 31st of October, 1517, Luther is a loyal Roman Catholic, he is a faithful Papist. As I noted above, he himself believes in some very restrained use of indulgences, as long as they are properly administered. Nor has he any wish to attack the Roman Church. He does not question papal authority. All he wants to do is call attention to the abuses of indulgences by their sale, and to correct the dreadful scandal which Tetzel has brought into Saxony. He does not intend to break with Rome. He has no other concept of the church in his mind than the One Holy Catholic and Roman Church system which has dominated Europe for twelve hundred years. He is no political rebel. He is no rabble-rouser. The Church and the State are one, both to Rome and to Luther. He has no thought of interfering with the political or religious system when he nails

### *The Distant Rumble of Battle*

his theses to the door at Wittenberg on the 31st of October, 1517. It never even crosses his mind. He is not anti-papal. He is only thinking of the eternal welfare of those who listen to his preaching. He wants a stop put to Tetzel. That is all.

Nevertheless, although he does not realise it, the sound of Luther's hammer blows upon the door at Wittenberg will never die away. The blows will echo throughout Germany, throughout Europe; what is more, they will be heard throughout the world. For even though he has written his theses in Latin, they will be quickly translated into German, whereupon they will spread like wild-fire to become the talk of Germany and the wider world beyond. Nor is it a small issue which Luther has raised. It is no passing difficulty which he is about to deal with. The 31st of October, 1517, is a date which will never be forgotten – no! not to the end of time. The Reformation has dawned. Luther does not know it, but he has just opened a crack in the sluice gates of truth. A tiny trickle is just beginning to flow. Soon the trickle will become a stream; the stream, a river; the river, a flood.

To change the figure, Martin Luther does not realise it but he has just declared spiritual war on Rome. He thinks he has called for a debate on the sale of indulgences. But in reality he has just begun a war to be fought with the weapons of the Spirit of God. He has unleashed the battle for the reformation of the Church, the consequences of which he could never have imagined.

In fact, although Luther did nothing to spread the knowledge of his arguments generally among the people but merely called for a scholarly debate, others acted very differently. They took the matter into their own hands, and in a short time the world heard all about it. It became the common talk of the day. For the truth is, of course, the ninety-five theses were – and soon came to be seen as – a three-pronged attack upon the very fabric of the Papacy. *First*, the theses questioned the raising and spending of money to build a magnificent building in Rome in order to house – according to papal myths – the bones of Peter. *Secondly*, the theses were a contradiction of the papal claims to be able to remit sins. *Thirdly*, they were a direct assault on indulgences altogether. Luther himself would come to see that indulgences are ‘most pernicious because they induce complacency and thereby imperil salvation. Those persons are damned who think that letters of indulgence make them certain of salvation’.

The question was: What would be the outcome of this threefold attack? Not so much: What would happen to Luther? Rather, what would happen to his protest?

Now Martin Luther was not the first man to see that the Roman Church needed to be reformed. He was not the first to raise his voice against the

pope and all the errors, superstitions and corruptions of the depraved papistical religion. Down the centuries, again and again the cry had gone up to God for needed reform, and many had attempted it. All through the long years of spiritual slavery, many had given their lives in the cruel struggle for liberty.

For instance, three hundred years before Luther, the Waldenses, high in the Piedmont Alps, had protested against the superstitions of Rome. One hundred and fifty years before Luther, John Wycliffe in England had preached the Scriptures against the pope. A hundred years before Luther, John Huss had been burned at the stake in Bohemia because of his attack upon the scandals of the papist clergy. In addition, thousands of men and women, known and unknown, all down the long years of the Dark Ages, had made their protest against the Papacy and sealed it with their blood.

No! The thirty-four year old monk at Wittenberg was not the first to protest against Rome. But this time it would be different, for it was God's appointed time to reform his church. God, who had been working down the centuries, dramatically brought his purpose to a head in Luther's simple act. When he nailed the ninety-five theses to the door at Wittenberg on the 31st of October, 1517, Luther was the human instrument chosen by God to set in motion the titanic struggle. It was God's time for the battle for the church. Thousands would have to give their lives in the bitter, long years of war required to recover the truth. Many hardships would have to be borne. Much blood would flow. But the truth would conquer. The church would be reformed. If Luther had only realised it, he might well have addressed God in the words of the Psalmist:

You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favour her, yes, the set time has come (Ps. 102:13).

The battle had begun. Truly there was 'a noise of war in the camp'. The hosts of God were on the march.

## *England Joins the Fray*

A sound of battle is in the land

Jeremiah 50:22

*London, 1521 – Wolsey burns Luther's works – Henry writes a book – Rome overreaches herself – Henry revolts against the pope – persecutes all opponents*

It is the 12th of May, 1521, and less than four years have passed since Luther made his protest at Wittenberg. Milling, jostling crowds pack the streets which lead to St Paul's in the City of London, England. Today, Thomas Wolsey, Cardinal of the Church of Rome, papal legate and the Chancellor of England, rides by.

At long last the splendid procession comes into view. Haughty Thomas Wolsey makes his proud progress with solemn pomp, bedecked in magnificence, bearing a confidence which stems from his riches and power. He oozes an arrogance with the display of his wealth – a wealth which equals that of a king. Gold is commonplace. His sumptuous clothes are woven in threads of gold and silk, as are the harness and hangings of his horse. Silver crosses are carried high in majestic state before and after his regal personage. His cardinal's hat is borne by a favoured lord who paces in stately manner beside the legate's horse. Bishops, priests, assorted ambassadors of both Pope and Emperor, various barons and knights comprise his entourage. There follows a long straggling line of mules, each plodding beast draped in a rich cloth of vivid hue and weighed down with books – the books of Martin Luther.

What brings the Cardinal to St Paul's Cross? To what purpose this triumphal procession of the second most powerful man in all England?

Cardinal Wolsey has important business on hand this day; a business which lies close to his heart. He is come to St Paul's to carry out to the letter the purpose of his master, the king of England, Henry VIII. Henry, for his part, wishes to show himself a loyal son of Rome. This irritating madness which has come out of Saxony in recent days must be dealt with. Has not the Holy Father, the pope, issued a Bull against that audacious monk of Wittenberg? Then he, Henry, will make clear to all the world that England will have none of Luther's blasphemies. Others may be deceived, but not the king of England! To prove it, Henry has decreed that the insolent monk's books shall be destroyed by fire at St Paul's. That is why Cardinal Wolsey's procession carries Luther's works to the flames. Now... if only Henry could lay hands on the monk himself. If only...

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Wolsey's cardinal's hat is placed with due veneration upon the great altar. Fisher, Bishop of Rochester comes forward. He takes his stand, waits until the hum dies away, clears his throat and begins to preach; to preach against the heretic, Luther. And against all his works.

After the sermon, in the presence of an immense throng, Luther's books are solemnly cast into the fire. In this way, with all the display of reverence that only Rome can muster, in league with the pomp and majesty of the king of England, Luther's works are destroyed in the flames. Such was England's official reaction to Luther's theses, nailed to the door at Wittenberg, and to the upheaval in the Church of Rome which had so quickly followed.

But this bonfire of Luther's works was not enough for Henry. He knew he could make a greater contribution to Rome's cause than a mere bonfire! Far greater! Was there a battle being waged for the Church on the Continent? Then he, himself – Henry, king of England – he would enter the field. He would take up arms in the realm of religion. He would show his mettle. Since his youth, had he not been renowned for his theological learning? Now – now he would prove it. And in so doing he would merit Rome's gratitude, at least in public, and no doubt some recognition of – some consideration for – his theological prowess. Henry had long envied the kings of France and Spain. Why should they be addressed as 'Most Christian King' or 'Catholic King'? Did the king of England not deserve a similar title? Did he not *more* deserve it? Was it not true that if his brother had not died then he, Henry, would have been consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury? But since his brother had died, the kingship of England had come to rest upon his capable shoulders. Nevertheless, was he not a theologian besides being a king? Then he would make the world acknowledge it. What a heaven-sent opportunity, this nonsense from Saxony. How very fortunate that this upstart monk of Wittenberg had challenged – had raised his fist against – the citadel of Rome. Well... let him. Let him! Henry would prove himself the worthy champion of the Holy See. He would grab the world by the ears. He, the head of the House of Tudor, he would take up the gauntlet thrown down by this beggarly nobody, this audacious monk of Wittenberg. Luther, who was he? What were his theses and books? Humph! The king of England would refute him – by a book of his own.

This sally against Luther formed only part of a series of complicated political moves which Henry engaged in to try to earn international prestige for himself. For several years since, the king had been looking for a way to cut a figure in Europe, but until this time his efforts had come to nothing. In 1519, encouraged by the pope, he had made a serious attempt to gain election as the Holy Roman Emperor. If this had come off, Henry

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would have partnered the pope in the governance of Christendom, the pair of them serving as joint rulers over a massive Empire stretching from Holland to North Africa, a dominion which was already being enlarged by valuable acquisitions in the Central Americas. But the political in-fighting had come to nothing.

Still with an eye to the main chance, a mere week after his failure to secure the election as Emperor, Henry wrote a long letter to the pope in which he promised to meet the Holy Father's call for a Crusade against Islam. The king promised to furnish a large force and personally lead it against the enemy in order 'to strike a blow for Christendom', which, he went on, 'has ever been the summit of our ambition. We gird ourselves for this most holy expedition, and dedicate our whole kingdom, our wealth, our goods, our prestige to it; yes, our very blood and body we offer and dedicate to Christ and his vicar. Whenever the call is made we will be ready'. In his letter he gave the game away. Henry was looking for prestige. But this project, like his earlier attempt to become Holy Roman Emperor, failed to get off the ground.

During 1520-1521 the possibility that Wolsey might become Pope was seriously mooted, and the necessary political wheels began to turn. If it had worked out, Wolsey would have been only the second Englishman to reach such heights. Naturally this would have 'brought acclaim and honour to England and its king'. But, once again, it was not to be.

So Henry, still on the look out for an opportunity to dazzle the world, decided to launch an attack on Luther's volume, *The Babylonian Captivity*. Egged on by Wolsey, the king drew on some earlier pieces he had written on indulgences and papal authority, to produce his book in time for his Cardinal to hold a manuscript copy of it in his hand at the burning of the heretic's works at St Paul's. The author certainly did not lack confidence in his ability, calling his book a *Defence of the Seven Sacraments, against Martin Luther, by the Most Invincible King of England and France, and Lord of Ireland, Henry VIII*.

The masses greeted the appearance of the volume with rapturous applause, and stupendous claims were made for Henry's genius. Why, it was solemnly asserted that 'the sun never saw such a book... it compares to the books of Augustine'. The public adulation reached the realms of fantasy when it was declared that Henry's wisdom with words made him into 'a second Solomon'. It was almost a repeat of the praise – virtually the worship – of King Herod which exceeded all bounds, when the crowd kept shouting that they heard 'the voice of a god and not of a man!' (Acts 12:21-22). The pope gave the public impression that he was most enthusiastic about the book, declaring it so good it could only have been written by the aid of the Holy Spirit! Even so, the pope was reluctant to

satisfy the king's long-standing desire for title and honours. As I have explained, Henry had been badgering the Papacy over many years – titles like 'Protector of the Holy See' and 'King Apostolic' had been bandied about, but always rejected by Rome. At long last the reluctant Pope yielded to the constant pressure. He published a Bull to honour Henry for his book, appointing him 'Defender of the Faith'. Yet the Holy Father, grateful as he was for Henry's stalwart effort against Luther, would not add 'Orthodox', 'Glorious' or 'Faithful' to the inscription. Nor did he intend to grace Henry's successors with the title. No problem! Henry saw to that himself! To jump a few years and anticipate events, despite the pope's intentions, the king, having overthrown the Papacy, would eventually make over the honour to himself and his descendants in an Act of 1543. But, later, his daughter Mary, in the time of the ascendancy of the Papacy once more, would repeal the Act. Nevertheless Elizabeth would finally settle the title upon all the sovereigns of England, where it rests to this very day. 'Defender of the Faith', indeed!

Luther's response to Henry's writings was somewhat less enthusiastic than the pope's. He wrote that 'they are making a great boast of a little book by the king of England'. Undaunted, he carried on with his work for the further reformation of the church. Accordingly, on the 21st of September, 1522, three thousand copies of Luther's translation of the New Testament into the common language of the German people came off the presses in Wittenberg. Henry regarded this as yet another challenge to Rome, and denounced the work.

These seemingly unconnected and insignificant events had large consequences in the battle for the church in England. What possible good for the cause of Christ could come from political intrigues played out between the House of Tudor and the Papacy? And what about the destruction of Luther's books? At the time, these episodes appeared as setbacks for the cause of the recovery of New Testament church life. Luther's writings and his German New Testament were consumed in the flames; Henry had drawn closer to Rome, and the door of England had been slammed and firmly locked against the Scriptures in the common language; England would remain rigidly Papist under Henry's dominion; he had proved himself a worthy champion of the Papacy. More than that, as long as Henry was on the throne, England would never succumb to the newfangled errors of the Reformed faith.

But...

The Papists did not rest content with their attempted destruction of Luther's version of the New Testament. That was not enough for them – they must go one step further. And in this they over-reached themselves.

They produced a New Testament version of their own, and the Papacy expressed no objection to faithful Catholics reading this translation, Luther's rendering 'corrected' by Rome. In fact, in some parts of Europe the people were allowed to read any version of the Scriptures – except the one from Wittenberg. But in the providence of God, this very edict ensured that the people *did* read the Bible. What is more, the Papists must have forgotten that the Psalmist centuries before had praised God, saying that 'the entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple' (Ps. 119:130). So it proved once again. Rome actually advanced the Reformation in general, and the recovery of New Testament church life in particular, when she herself issued copies of the Scriptures in the common language of the people in order to 'out-Luther' Luther. In this way, Rome unwittingly aided the cause of God against herself in the battle for church life. She fell by her own counsels (Ps. 5:10).

Moreover, Henry's natural vanity was fed most generously by the adulation he received for 'his little book' against Luther. Not least, the praise and honour he received from the pope himself fed the fires of Henry's pride. Thus Henry's fertile mind began to work. He started to think thoughts, disturbing thoughts. He grew arrogant, more arrogant. He began to feel that perhaps... after all... maybe... he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Think of that! The pope himself had declared that the king of England had been guided and aided by the Holy Spirit of God in his writing. Well... Henry's fevered brain dwelt upon large matters, and from this time on he would let no one contradict his will. He began to contemplate even bigger things, dangerous things, exciting things. Why should the pope reside at Rome? Why not in England? Henry began to think in terms of infallibility – his own infallibility...

This, too, would have far-reaching consequences for the church. Eventually it would lead to the complete severance of the Church of England from Rome. It would take time, but in the providence of God various events would occur, including the bitter conflict with Rome over the king's divorce, which would lead Henry to break with the Papacy – yet not to make England anti-Papist. No! Henry would always be a Papist. Nonetheless, he would break with Rome to become his own Pope – Pope in England, in addition to being king in England! Head of the House of Tudor, and Supreme head of the Church of England.

Nor must it be forgotten that, in all these intrigues, the complicated and self-serving ramifications of the relationship between Catherine of Aragon, Henry's queen in England, and Charles, the Holy Roman Emperor – aunt and nephew – were played out.

What was going on? What were all these political manoeuvrings between Rome and London? In the early 16th century, the Church and the

State, religion and politics, were very much inter-related. Actually, it was far worse than that; the Church and the State were one body. Religion was politics, and *vice-versa*. How had this come about? In New Testament times, the church was always separate from the State, and always independent of the State. So how had this change arisen? And why? This is a vital matter which we will have to explore in more detail as we go along. Simply to say at this point that the Church and the State had been fused into one body by the so-called ‘conversion’ of the Roman Emperor, Constantine, twelve hundred years before. As I have shown elsewhere, the story is more complicated, but Constantine certainly was a major player in the disastrous union of the State and Church. He had introduced the novel idea of enforcing Christianity by political power; he had effectively changed men’s attitude to the relationship between the church of Christ and the State. And immense damage had been caused by the change. Change? It was a revolution, nothing less than a tearing-up of the New Testament relationship between State and church!

Henry VIII was able to make full use of the Constantinian thought processes which dominated men’s minds at the time, and had done so for those twelve centuries. He, as did the overwhelming majority, could not think in any other way. And it was a catastrophe of immense proportions. As the account of the battle to reform the church unfolds, the diabolical effects of the Emperor Constantine’s step towards the union of State and Church in the 4th century will become more and more apparent. Whatever else Henry was doing, in all his shenanigans he was not overthrowing Constantine! When Henry took the English portion of the Catholic Church out of the Church of Rome, and thereby formed the Church of England, all he did was to substitute one political power for another, one tyrant for another. The king simply replaced the pope by himself; London superseded Rome. Constantine was still master, and Christendom still held sway. So... when Henry felt the need to execute by gallows and stake all who stood in his way, it was just an obvious step to take – obvious to those who were steeped in Constantinian methods. Political power wielding the sword had enforced a uniform religion for more than a millennium. Or tried to! That was all there was to it. The king would hang all who supported the pope, and yet he would burn all who stood against his own brand of Popery. It has been said:

In that age, indeed, there seemed to be no alternative between the supremacy of the pope and the supremacy of the king. The minds of the best of men, as is the case with some even in these days, were so warped by ancient ecclesiastical precedents that none dared [to make] an ultimate appeal to... Scripture.

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I am glad to say that the last few words just quoted are not strictly accurate. If they were, this book would never have been written. What is far worse, England would be under the heel of the Roman jack-boot to this very day. The fact is there were some who would appeal to Scripture. A whole host of them – a veritable army of men and women who were prepared to live and die for the recovery of church life according to the New Testament. Scripture, not Constantine, would win the day. The Bible, not ‘ancient ecclesiastical precedents’ would be their sole authority.

The 16th-century English revolt against Rome came out of the king of England’s clashes with Luther in 1521 and 1522. During that revolution, the battle for the church, on the surface, seemed to go Rome’s way at the time, but the reality was very different. By the will of God, Henry VIII, without the slightest knowledge or intention of it, ensured that the church had taken another step away from Rome and towards the recovery of the New Testament pattern. And this reformation now included the church in England.

An important biblical lesson is illustrated by this. God’s providences are a great mystery; yet we know that he effectively works his will in all things. ‘The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; he turns it wherever he wishes’ (Prov. 21:1). We cannot always understand God’s purposes. Not only that, sometimes it might appear that things seem to work against his promises, yet it is not so for God governs all men and all events, and he always works out his perfect will. ‘But our God is in heaven; he does whatever he pleases’ (Ps. 115:3). Nevertheless men remain responsible for their sins; even so the LORD rules over all to bring about his own ends. What Christ said to Peter may justly be applied to such circumstances: ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this’ (John 13:7).

In the 1520s, the men and women in England who longed for deliverance from Rome might well have felt that, as at so many times in the past, the Papacy would once again prove too strong to allow reform. What with kings, cardinals and the pope to defend the massive structure, bolstered by its twelve hundred years of tradition, its army of secret agents and spies, and its manipulation of puppet governments... could anything or anyone ever break its grip? Doubtless, as very often before, once more Rome would prove too cunning, too powerful for the forces of reform.

But it was not so. It was not to be. There was no question of Rome ‘allowing’ reform. God does not wait upon man’s permission! God would bring about the reform of the church, and he would actually make use of the very principalities and powers who so bitterly and resolutely opposed him, even of the Papacy itself, to accomplish the overthrow of Popery in England! God’s declared word would be fulfilled yet again:

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He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot carry out their plans. He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the cunning comes quickly upon them. They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope at noontime as in the night. But he saves the needy from the sword, from the mouth of the mighty, and from their hand. So the poor have hope... (Job 5:12-16).

## *The Rise of the Anabaptists*

Many of the saints I shut up in prison... and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often... and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities

Acts 26:10-11

*Zurich, 1525 – the first Anabaptist church formed – the significance of the step – the break with Constantine – Zwingli, his progress and failure – Church and State after Constantine – the views of the Papists and the Reformers – reaction to the Anabaptists by both – their use of the magistrate – Luther's views – joining the Church and State – uniform religion enforced – Luther's admiration of the Anabaptists – his attempt to copy them and return to Scripture – his failure – plan B – persecution of the Anabaptists – its failure – Luther's inconsistency – Munster – the spread of Anabaptism – the death of Manz*

It is night in Zurich on the 21st of January, 1525, and the snow lies thick upon the ground. A lone man, wrapped against the bitter wind and keeping to the shadows, trudges along the street known as Neustadt close by the Grossmunster. He stops, glances furtively about him, then knocks gently upon a door, his breath coming hoary in the frosty air. He rubs his numbed hands together and stamps his feet in the snow. The door is opened a mere crack. For a brief moment the shadowy snow is dimly yellowed by the flickering light from within. The man kicks the snow from his boots and steps quickly across the threshold. The door is closed, the bolt shot home. The street falls dark and silent once more – apart from the mournful moan of the freezing wind.

A second man comes into the street, clinging to the shadows. He also steps inside the house. He is followed by two others; then another... Within a few minutes, twelve or so men are packed into the room of the house which belongs to Felix Manz. Their breath hangs misty, their faces reddened with cold. They blow upon their numb fingers, rub their arms and nervously shuffle their feet. But their spirits are even colder than their bodies. Disappointment, sadness, grief is scored upon their features, especially about their eyes. Their hearts are heavy with anxious care – too full for words.

Are we all here? Good! Well, let's pray then.

They fall upon their knees. Words come now.

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O Lord God Most High in heaven, hear us. You are the God who teaches and guides all hearts, grant us your direction, guide us, show us your mercy. Help us, O Lord, for our flesh is weak. Help us, O Lord, for without your help we shall not be able to withstand the persecution and the suffering which will surely come upon us...

Their prayers come to an end. Slowly they rise to their feet. One, George Blaurock, speaks, his eyes meeting those of one of the others:

Conrad Grebel, I ask you... for God's sake, baptise me... baptise me with the true baptism, with Christian baptism. I acknowledge my faith in Christ. Baptise me, I ask you.

Conrad Grebel obeys the request of his friend and baptises him, following which Blaurock baptises all the others. Each man professes himself to be a true believer in Christ. Each promises to follow Christ as a true disciple should. Each pledges to live his life separated from the world. And they promise to teach the gospel and maintain the faith together.

In this way, on the 21st of January, 1525, in Zurich, Anabaptism was born. That wintry night, the first church of the Anabaptists came into existence. A little more than seven brief years had passed since Luther nailed his theses to the door at Wittenberg when this church was formed. Its members were those, and only those, who had been baptised upon profession of their faith in Christ.

This was a step of the utmost significance. It was nothing short of a revolution. By this act, a mighty blow was struck in the struggle for the church, since this was the greatest, the most complete break with Rome which could have taken place. It is not too much to say that more than a thousand years of the Church system which had been imposed by Rome on millions of men and women, and the slavery which she had enforced by a reign of terror throughout Europe, were broken that night in the house of Felix Manz by this tiny handful of brothers. It is a gross understatement to say that Rome would fight back, but the zenith of her power had passed. These dozen or so men had possessed the audacity to wrench their shackles off! And thousands of enslaved believers would follow them. Thousands upon thousands! Nevertheless, the first Anabaptists could not have realised just how immense a step they had taken. These Swiss Christians had simply obeyed their understanding of God's word, dared to follow the teaching of Scripture on the doctrine of the church, and in this way a church had been formed on the only basis known in the New Testament. The consequences would be felt throughout Europe; what is more, throughout the world. They will be felt as long as time shall be.

These Swiss believers were not the first to reject infant baptism and the theories of Constantine. Oh no! During the Dark Ages there had been those

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who denounced the Papacy, and – among other things – baptised only believers. Some formed churches of such. Interestingly, among the scores of abusive labels which had been given to them by the Papists down the centuries, one was Anabaptist! Unfortunately, many of the details of their heroic struggles have been lost as a consequence of the tremendous war Rome unleashed upon them. But men such as Peter of Bruys, who laboured in the south of France, and was burned at the stake in 1124, and Henry of Lausanne, who was condemned at the Council of Rheims in 1148, and languished in solitary confinement and starvation until he died, are all known to God. Also some of the Waldenses and Albigenses were forerunners of the Anabaptists of Zurich. As only to be expected, we mainly – or only – know about these and similar believers through the censures of the Papists. Nevertheless, the scant details we have tell us that Rome did not have it all her own way, not even at the height of her power. God did not leave himself without witness (Acts 14:17). No, not even in the Dark Ages.

But why were the Swiss believers so sad in 1525? And why so furtive?

They were sad because, by their obedience to Christ, they had been forced to forsake their friend Ulrich Zwingli. In the same year that Luther made his protest against Rome, Ulrich Zwingli, a priest in the Roman Church, was reading the recently published Greek New Testament. He was struggling with the things he discovered there, for God was speaking to him about his sin and about the only Saviour of sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ. By 1519, Zwingli was converted. An outbreak of the plague had concentrated his mind on eternal things, and he found help by the study of the teachings of Luther. Above all, he was led to faith in Christ by his reading of the New Testament.

By 1522, Zwingli was in Zurich in charge of the reformation taking place there. Around him were several young men who had been converted through his ministry. These young men, endowed with outstanding ability, were vigorous in faith and all were eager to learn as they studied the Greek New Testament under Zwingli's instruction. The group included Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz, among others. All of them were committed to the furtherance of the gospel; all of them were zealous for Christ; and all of them were more than willing to play their part in the battle which was raging for the recovery of the church. Indeed, they were eager for it.

Sadly, by the end of 1523, sharp differences arose between Zwingli and several of the young men over the correct way to proceed and bring about the full reformation of the church. Zwingli at first agreed with the others that the Scriptures, and only the Scriptures, should determine what was to be done in the church. But he drew back from that position. For example,

although he knew the Mass was an abomination according to the teaching of the Bible, he was unwilling to abolish it until the town council gave him the authority. All the same, at one stage he did make up his mind to end the observance of the Mass, and he actually went as far as to set a date for the momentous step – Christmas Day, 1523. However, a short while before the day arrived, he abandoned his plans. The young men felt betrayed by their erstwhile friend and teacher.

The question of baptism was also raised among them – even before the ending of the Mass. Zwingli went so far as to assert that infant baptism was not valid, since it was not warranted by Scripture, and he even preached against it. But in this matter, as in the question of the Mass, he compromised and drew back from his stated position.

All this was a great source of sadness to the young men, and could so easily have shaken their resolve and dampened their ardour. Nonetheless, they knew they must continue to follow Scripture and obey Christ. If this meant they had to sever the precious bonds of friendship with their former teacher, then so be it. They owed much to Zwingli, but they owed everything to Christ.

Yet why were they so secretive about it? What was there to be afraid of? The answer is, a great deal! Their fears were fully justified and arose directly out of the dominance of Constantine ideas in the Church and State. I referred to this in the previous chapter. We shall look into the matter a little more fully at this point.

### ***Church and State after Constantine***

The step the Anabaptists took that night in the house of Felix Manz amounted to a rejection of the Church system which had dominated Europe since the days of the Roman Emperor Constantine early in the 4th century. As previously explained, Constantine had taken steps which led to the joining together the State and the Church, fusing it into one body – something completely foreign to the New Testament – thereby forcing Christianity upon men by the power of civil law. Although all the changes did not come in overnight, from that time on, to belong to the State (that is, to be a citizen of a country) would come to mean the same thing as being a member of the Church. In this way, the nonsensical notion of a ‘Christian country’ was born. Although the story is complicated, and there were many twists and turns, it was not long before the pope ousted the Emperor as head of Church and State – there can be only one head! – and from that time the Papacy locked Europe in its iron grip. Shrewdly taking over the apparatus of government – both spiritual and temporal – the Roman

hierarchy enforced its will on all the people by what amounted to a virtual police-state throughout the Continent.

Entrance to this Universal Church was brought about by infant baptism at the hand of a priest. Every infant in the State was baptised; every baptised infant was said to be regenerate; every baptised infant was a member of the Church. If any man dared to leave the Church, even if such a thing were possible, he became virtually Stateless. Excommunication by the Church authorities meant the removal of the apostate from the Church, but it also signalled his or her expulsion from the State. That is a pleasant way of putting it. It meant exile or execution, of course. The cost in human suffering was colossal. Thousands were slaughtered. Thus the huge numbers of men and women who were burned at the stake or strangled or drowned in the name of religion during the Dark Ages, were executed as a direct consequence of the edicts of Constantine. Indeed, the same kind of reasoning has been responsible for the martyrdom of countless men and women in the name of religion – grievously, not excepting ‘Christ’ – ever since. We shall meet the dire practice repeatedly in these pages. It is one of the major threads which binds this history together.

Relations between the Church and the State became very complicated after the Emperor Constantine’s so-called conversion. Until that time the New Testament position largely prevailed; that is, Christians believed that the church and the State were both instituted by God, that they had distinct and separate powers, and it was wrong for either body to trespass on the realm of the other. In other words, the church did not try to organise the State; nor did the church allow itself to be organised by the State. The two kingdoms were separate. However, the State would not long tolerate this independent spiritual body which thrived among its citizens, so it soon began to persecute the church, and many saints were put to death by the civil authorities. This brutality commenced even in New Testament times, as is clear from the many references to it. (See, for example, Matt. 10:17-18,23; Acts 4:1-30; 5:17-18,27-28,40-41; 8:1; 9:1; 12:1-4; 18:12; Heb. 10:32-34; Rev. 2:10,13; see also, perhaps, Acts 21:33; 22:24). Nevertheless, the church continued to prosper spiritually despite – or because of – the persecution, and it generally managed to keep itself free of State influence. But in the early years of the 4th century, Constantine brought the persecution to an end by virtually welding the Church and State into one body, thus forming the monolithic State-Church. Once established, this then became the norm for over a thousand years. It was a tragedy of mammoth dimensions.

From the time of Constantine, either the Church or the State could be master of this man-made monster, the State-Church. But only one of the partners could be master, not both. When it was offered the chance, the

Papacy made sure the Church was dominant over the State. On occasions the roles were reversed, and the State ruled the Church – a condition known as Erastianism, so named after one Thomas Erastus, who was born in Switzerland in 1524. Erastianism, however, existed long before Erastus. For example, it was a feature of the Council of Clarendon in 1164 which proposed that the excommunication of a nobleman should only be allowed with the king's consent. By this dogma, the Church became a mere department of State. The Church of England, for one, adopted Erastian principles.

Between the two extremes – domination of the Church by the State and *vice-versa* – a third expedient was adopted by the Reformers, following Luther's break with Rome. They approved of Constantine's fusion of the Church and State, and they said that both constituents are of equal status, equal partners in the State-Church union. That was the teaching of Luther, Zwingli and, later, Calvin, along with the rest of the Reformers, as I will show. At least, it was so in theory. I will develop this enigmatic point as the story unfolds. It was the position the Presbyterians would eventually adopt in due course. But the claim of equality for the two partners of the State-Church coalition proved a severely unstable position. So much so, either the one or the other inevitably came to dominate the partnership. The truth is, the measures the Reformers put in place led to a virtual Erastianism in the Reformed Churches; that is, the domination of the Church by the State. But in 1525 all that lay in the future.

As I said, Constantine complicated matters. He did worse than that. Far worse. He started the wholesale corruption of the scriptural relationship between the State and the church, with consequences so vile they are hard to overstate. Spurgeon had something to say about the way many regarded the Emperor through rose-coloured spectacles and even saw him as the glorious fulfilment of the prophecy of the man-child in Revelation 12. Spurgeon commented:

If you refer to the expositors you will find that they discover in this passage the dragon-ensign of pagan Rome, and its removal from its position by Constantine, who set up the cross in its stead. I do not believe the Lord took any more interest in Constantine than in any other sinner, and it seems to me little short of blasphemous to say that he was the man-child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron, and was caught up to God and to his throne.

Spurgeon went on to say – and his words ought to be weighed very carefully – Constantine's 'adoption of Christianity as the State religion was not a thing for glorified spirits to rejoice in, but a dreadful calamity, fitted only to make sport for Pandemonium. No one ever did the church a worse turn than he who first joined her to the State. The act was a piece of State

policy and kingcraft and no more, a business utterly unworthy of record by an inspired pen'.

That is the truth of the matter. Yet the Papists and the Reformers thought Constantine was a triumph! In shining contrast, the Anabaptists regarded him – and rightly so – as an unmitigated disaster. They challenged the Constantine doctrine and all that followed from it by their action in Zurich in 1525. What they did was to go back to the New Testament position regarding the relations between the church and the State, and they overthrew the twelve hundred years of almost unbroken wrong-headed practice. Naturally the defenders of Constantine immediately latched on to the most visible aspect of the Anabaptist's rebellion against the *status quo* – the question of baptism. Infant baptism was central to the entire culture of the Constantine State-Church. It was absolutely basic to it. The Papists and the Reformers put their finger on this vital point when they nicknamed the Swiss brothers 'Anabaptists', from the Greek word for 'again', because it was said that they baptised again. They 're-baptised'. The Anabaptists themselves denied this, and denied it emphatically. They declared that their infant baptism had not been valid; it was no baptism at all. Their baptism as believers was their one and only baptism since the baptism of infants was alien to the New Testament. This stance provoked a severe reaction against them, to put it mildly. It is this response we now look at.

### ***Reaction to the Anabaptists by the Papists and the Reformers***

Naturally, the Papists hated the Anabaptists and all their works and doctrines. No wonder! The 'heretics' had struck a blow at the very foundation of the papal system, and shaken it mightily. They had attacked the Romish method of entrance to the Church; in fact, they had attacked the very notion and basis of the Roman Church altogether. It would not be tolerated! It could not be allowed to go unpunished if the Papacy was to survive. Rome looked to her vested interests, and moved decisively to protect them. There was nothing for it. The Anabaptists must be exterminated. For this reason, Rome poured a torrent of fire upon them.

But sadder still, the Reformers also hated the Anabaptists. Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin in his turn, along with many others, were scathing of them. Far worse, the Reformers attacked and abused them with vigour. I emphasise the point I have just made – the Reformers and the Papists held similar views on the union of the Church and State, both asserting that Constantine was a triumph in the history of the church. The 'heretics', to the contrary, retorted that both he and his doctrine were utter disasters. The gulf could not have been wider.

The Reformers and the Papists both believed it was the magistrate's task to enforce discipline in the church, whereas the 'heretics' said the magistrate had no power in Christ's kingdom. This was to prove a battle-ground which would be fought over many times in the next one hundred and fifty years. Alas, the Reformers and the Papists proved unlikely companions in arms against the Anabaptists in the struggle for the recovery of the New Testament church. It was another instance of former enemies made allies against a common foe; almost as bad as Pilate and Herod who, sinking their differences for a while and treating Christ with contempt and mockery, 'became friends with each other, for before that they had been at enmity with each other' (Luke 23:11-12). What is more, between them the Papists and the Reformers had a firm grip on the levers of State, and possessed the sword which enabled them to enforce their will upon the masses. Nor did they hesitate to exercise their grisly power – they wielded it with vigour in one form or another. The truth, however, resided with the despised 'heretics'.

### ***The views of Zwingli and Luther – Luther especially***

Zwingli and his followers were very severe towards the Anabaptists, and persecuted them with savage intensity. He believed firmly in the power of the magistrate to carry out Church discipline. In this he was a virtual Erastian. But what was Luther's attitude towards the Anabaptists? First of all, it is necessary to discover what Luther believed in principle, and then to see how far he worked his understanding out in practice. What did Luther think about relations between the State and the Church? What did he think about uniformity or divergency in religion? Should men be forced to practice a common religion, or could they do as they believed according to their conscience enlightened by Scripture, free of punishment? Unfortunately, there is great difficulty in defining Luther's views on these questions, and the same goes for Calvin. The fact is, Luther's views were complicated and confused, even ambiguous and contradictory.

Now what did Luther think of the Church and State? He simply could not make up his mind. Sometimes he viewed the church in the old Constantine manner, as a mixture of believers and unbelievers lumped together by their infant baptism – wheat and tares; that is, he, like all the Reformers, misapplied the parable of the tares. I will examine this misinterpretation of Scripture in a later chapter. By his mistaken understanding of the parable, Luther could say that 'the temporal authorities are baptised with the same baptism as we'. By this, he meant that the Church and the State were one and the same, they constituted one

body. This unity came about through the sacramental rite of infant baptism which made all citizens into Church members.

That is one aspect of his views.

Yet at other times Luther regarded the church in the same way as the Anabaptists did. In other words, he thought of the church as the New Testament speaks of it – a company of the regenerate, separate from the State; that is, Luther held similar views to the Anabaptists, who taught that regeneration, followed by faith, followed by baptism, led to New Testament church membership. The State and the church are separate. From time to time, Luther said things along those lines. So much so, it could be said of Luther that ‘the true church for him was always the church of the redeemed known only to God, manifest here and there on earth, small, persecuted and often hidden, at any rate scattered and united only in the bond of the Spirit’.

Reader, you can see how ambiguous Luther was on the make-up of the church. He simply could not decide.

Luther, in common with the Papists, also thought ‘the magistrate should be the nursing father of the Church’. But the consequence of this meant that the Church was somewhat dependent on – even beholden to – the State. Indeed, Luther went further when he made pronouncements and took steps which actually put the Church under the power of the State. For example, Luther – in desperation at the poor spiritual condition of the Church – was prepared to call upon the German nobility to reform it. In this way, he produced a Church which depended on the State to put it right, instead of it being a persecuted remnant within a pagan society, which is the biblical, and Anabaptist, concept of the church. Luther just could not see how a church could reform itself. It needed the outside power of the State to do the necessary work, he thought. Therefore, he looked to the nobility to put the reform of the Church in hand. But by this grossly mistaken view and misguided step, Luther ensured that the Church and the State became more closely linked. And worse, the Church was made subservient to the civil authority. In this appeal to the nobles, Luther actually hoped for the formation of a Christian State, though he did not believe that society could be Christianised! It was a grievous mistake on the part of Luther, born out of fear that the Reformation might collapse unless the political authorities rescued it. He hoped that recourse to the princes might be only temporary. Some hope! The reality is that ‘this timidity, which has been called prudence, did immense injury to the Reformation’, wrote J.H.Merle d’Aubigne. As a result of Luther’s mistaken action, from that time on the Reformed Church would be infiltrated by political agents, dominated by secular forces and thereby manipulated to serve the political ends of the

### *The Rise of the Anabaptists*

State. If only Luther had followed the Anabaptists back to the New Testament! But he did not, and the Reformed Church became an arm or department of the State. The true church, the scattered remnant, would be persecuted by the secret police which would be formed, inevitably, by the Reformed State-Church.

Luther's conflicting opinions made him into an enigma. Lloyd-Jones rightly said:

Luther's relationship to the Anabaptists is a most fascinating one; it is a kind of ambivalent relationship. He reacted against them, and yet in a sense he admired them and was a little bit jealous of the wonderful discipline that they were able to exercise in their own churches. He had to admit that there was a quality of life in their churches which was absent in the churches to which he belonged.

We shall see the horrendous consequences of Luther's tragic mistakes – mistakes repeated by many others – as we trace the unfolding of the battle for the church during the following hundred years or so. We shall see how this attempt to use the secular arm to establish the church was tried time and time again. And with appalling consequences in blood. Sadly, the desire on the part of some Christians to use political means to gain spiritual ground is not yet dead. With the best of motives, I freely admit – but mistakenly, all the same – believers are still laying their hands on the weapons forged by Constantine. As we go on, I will enlarge upon this.

This brings us to the next point. What about the issue of uniformity in religion and its enforcement by the State? Luther was muddled over it. On the one hand he could rightly say that 'heresy is a spiritual matter and cannot be prevented by constraint... Better to let men err than to drive them to lie'. But, as we shall discover, he was prepared to adopt measures which flatly contradicted this.

The upshot of all this is, Luther's views on these matters were never clear – neither to him nor others. He never resolved his position. He contradicted himself. As d'Aubigne said:

Never perhaps was there so immense a space between the premises laid down by any man and the conduct he adopted... There was some inconsistency in Luther: he often expressed himself in a contradictory manner on what princes ought and ought not to do in the Church. This is a point upon which the Reformer and his age had no very settled opinions.

The last few words just quoted are false. While Luther had no very settled views on these matters, it is not true to say that all the men of his age were as undecided as he. The Anabaptists had very clear convictions on the questions. And they were basically right in their views; that is, they were

scriptural. The consequence of Luther's indecision and mistaken opinions was dreadful.

And he was not alone in that.

### ***The practical effect of Luther's views***

It is time to trace out the practical effects of Luther's views. At first, he tried to form churches according to the New Testament pattern – 'to gather together such ardent souls as could be assembled in a particular locality'. But he failed. His system could not bring about the scriptural pattern. So he fell back to a second and inferior idea. Realising that the Reformed Church was in a desperate condition, he felt he had to form a 'church within the Church', drawing upon an ancient ploy of the Manichaean heretics. This misguided notion had long been taken over by the Constantine State-Church, but Luther resurrected it, spruced it up, and tried to give it a new lease of life. Nevertheless, despite his best endeavours, it failed miserably, as always. But, even so, it was not the last time this expedient would be used. Luther attempted to set up a spiritual nucleus within the carnal churches. In particular, in 1522 Luther drew up arrangements for the observance of the Lord's supper. He said that not all Church members could take the supper – only those who were truly Christian. What a dreadful mess this Constantine and Reformed view of the church leads to! Non-Christian church members? Should non-Christians be members of the church? It is not a case of non-Christians taking the supper – they ought not be in the church in the first place.

Anyway, Luther tried to restrict the Lord's supper to Christians, barring non-Christian Church members. But he failed. Why? Because things were so bad he just could not tell who the Christians were! A contemporary, Franz Lambert, bluntly called the vast majority of them nothing but heathen! They were Church members, but they needed to be saved. We shall come back to this theme, since it was a vital issue in the battle to recover New Testament church life and order. Luther persisted in his attempt to find the spiritual nucleus of the Reformed Church – 'he still desired to gather true believers into an inner fellowship'. But he found the procedure difficult, if not beyond him. In any case, it was contradicted by his other views and practices. Hence he drew back, and 'by 1526 he declared his dream to be impossible'. But it was at this very point that the Anabaptists proved him wrong. What is more, though he thought the Anabaptists were so greatly mistaken, they actually fascinated him, for they demonstrated that the New Testament pattern is not to be fobbed-off as an idealistic dream; it is workable. As I noted above, Luther envied the

Anabaptists and their churches in spite of himself. He really wanted their spirituality.

Luther now found himself caught in a dilemma, and he never got out of it. He never could decide whether the church is a voluntary body, made up of the regenerate – that is, the New Testament position – or if it is a territorial body, made up of every citizen baptised in infancy – the Constantine position. The Anabaptists plumped for the New Testament order. Luther wanted it, but said it could not be had.

By 1527, Luther was convinced that uniformity was essential. He was appalled at the confusion and chaos throughout Saxony with the multiplicity of separate churches which were springing up, in addition to this lack of spiritual life within the Reformed Church. There was only one solution as far as he could see. And this became ‘the big thing’ to Luther, his great idea. The Diet of Speyer in 1526 had given political power to the Electors – the heads of the German States. Luther grasped the main chance as he saw it. In every locality, there must be a single religion. There was nothing for it. A uniform religion had to be established. And the political powers would bring it about for him. They would do what he could not. Thus Germany would have one uniform religion. That would put an end to all the nonsense of various churches and carnality within the Reformed Church. But would it? Some hope!

And what about those who disagreed with the one enforced religion? What would Luther do with them? What is more, who would say what this uniform religion ought to be? And who, exactly, would put it into effect and enforce it? Finally, how would it be done? Luther, at first, allowed that those who disagreed with the form of this uniform Church could migrate to lands where they might find a more favourable environment. Further, he turned to the Elector to set up a board of ‘Visitors’ under the authority of the politicians, to bring in this one religion. Thus he put the Church into a position where it was under the thumb of the State.

The Anabaptists would have none of it. Not at any price! They were not going to be cowed into submission, nor would they just go away. Therefore just what could Luther do with them? In the beginning, he showed himself unwilling to butcher them, as the Zwinglians were doing. In 1527, he said, in reference to the Anabaptists:

It is not right, and I am deeply troubled that the poor people are so pitifully put to death, burned and cruelly slain. Let everyone believe what he likes. If he is wrong, he will have punishment enough in hell fire. Unless there is sedition, one should oppose them with Scripture... With fire you won’t get anywhere.

At this stage, Luther was thinking in terms of the death penalty – in this regard of enforcing religious uniformity – only for the crime of sedition. The Anabaptists were free to believe and practice as they wished, as long

as they were not seditious. If they were not rebellious, or did not incite disobedience to the State, they would be allowed liberty. But, of course, since the State and the Reformed Church were fast becoming virtually one and the same body, disagreement with the tenets of the Lutheran Church, and rebellion against the State, became very difficult to distinguish. However, even as late as June, 1528, Luther still thought banishment was sufficient punishment for the Anabaptists. He said: 'I cannot admit that false teachers are to be put to death. It is enough to banish'. But, by 1529, at the Second Diet of Speyer, things had moved, and moved with a vengeance. The death sentence was passed upon Anabaptists, and John, Elector of Saxony, began to execute them.

Luther was caught. He was trapped, enmeshed in the iron cogs of the State-Church machine which he had built, or which he had allowed to be built. By his foolish, misguided words and actions, he had fashioned a monster. He had made, he had forged, the State and the Reformed Church into one body. The engines of persecution, torture and death now began to grind the poor heretics to powder, to ashes. Luther fudged and squirmed. But he could not get free. In 1530, he went further in his opposition to the Anabaptists, perhaps driven on in spite of himself. He pronounced the death penalty upon them for blasphemy as well as sedition, defining both offences very narrowly. Then, in 1531, Melanchthon, Luther's fellow-German Reformer, produced a notorious *Memorandum* which Luther duly signed. This defined blasphemy even more tightly. For example, any criticism of the ministerial office – as defined by the enforcing power, that is – was called an 'insufferable blasphemy'. Another infamous *Memorandum* followed in 1536, again from Melanchthon, and again signed by Luther. Now *all* Anabaptists were to be put to death, not merely the political fanatics among them.

An indication of Luther's attitude during this diabolical confusion in which he was entangled by his own mistakes, is to be seen in the case of the thirty Anabaptists held by Philip of Hesse. Philip consulted various bodies – cities and universities – to determine what he should do with his prisoners. He had tried banishment, but they had not yielded. What could he do next? He was unwilling to execute them. Hence he consulted for advice. The sternest replies came from the Lutherans. Melanchthon argued that even passive resistance by the heretics must be met with death, and Luther actually signed the dreadful document. From now on, if anybody protested that it was wrong to punish those who dissented from the one State religion, that in itself was accounted blasphemy and merited death! The Anabaptists, with their practice of believer's baptism and separated churches, were an offence against God. They were an offence against the State-Church. They must die!

Luther tried to salve his conscience by adding postscripts to Melanchthon's *Memoranda*. He wrote: 'I assent. Although it seems cruel to punish them with the sword, it is crueler that they condemn the ministry of the Word and have no well-grounded doctrine and suppress the true, and in this way seek to subvert the civil order'. Contradicting himself, he added an appeal for mercy. But it was no use. It was too late. Things had gone too far, and the State machine was beyond his control. It had a life of its own. It cannot be denied – Luther himself grew hardened as the slaughter went on.

But despite its severity, all the persecution was utterly useless. Take Fritz Erbe as just a single example. Even though Erbe died in the Wartburg after sixteen years imprisonment, it was said that his continued 'steadfastness... had converted... half of the populace of Eisenach to Anabaptism'. Anabaptist growth was phenomenal.

I have said that Luther acted against his own principles. It hardly seems credible that the man who persecuted the Anabaptists with such savagery, could condemn himself so clearly in his own writings. For example, on the church and the State, he said: 'One must carefully distinguish between these two governments... one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds'. Again, with homely illustration in order that everybody could understand, he said:

Constantly I must pound in and squeeze in and drive and wedge in this difference between the two kingdoms, even though it is written and said so often that it becomes tedious. The devil never stops cooking and brewing these two kingdoms into each other. In the devil's name the secular leaders always want to be Christ's masters and teach him how he should run his church and spiritual government... May God hinder him [that is, the devil], amen.

Again he wrote:

The temporal government has laws which extend no further than to life and property and external affairs on earth, for God cannot and will not permit anyone but himself to rule over the soul. Therefore, when the temporal authority presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God's government and only misleads souls and destroys them. We want to make this so clear that everyone will grasp it, and that our fine gentlemen, the princes and bishops, will see what fools they are when they seek to coerce the people with their laws and commandments into believing this or that... I think it is clear enough here that the soul is taken out of all human hands and is placed under the authority of God alone.

Luther's frustration over men who continued to confuse the church and the State came to the surface in the open letter which he penned in 1525. He declared: 'There are two kingdoms, one the kingdom of God, the other the kingdom of the world. I have written this so often that I am surprised that there is anyone who does not know or remember it... Now he who would

confuse these two kingdoms... is the same as putting the devil in heaven and God in hell'.

It certainly seems that Luther had grounds for his frustration. The vast majority did confuse the two kingdoms. But there was one distinguished man above all others who did 'not know or remember' what Luther wrote. There was one man in particular who confused the two kingdoms. Unfortunately, that man was Martin Luther himself.

What is more, it would not have been so bad if he and his friends could have kept their bitterness to words, words which were as harsh as they could think of. Luther vented his spleen when he called the Anabaptists 'sneaks, corner preachers, fanatical enthusiasts, re-baptisers'. That last attack was the nub of it, of course. Another Lutheran gave voice to a blanket criticism; the Anabaptists were attempting 'to pervert everything in this human life', he said. They were the worst heretics of all time, apparently. Bad enough, in all conscience! If only the onslaught could have stayed at that level. Sadly, the Lutherans matched their actions with their words.

The Anabaptists were not perfect, needless to say. They made their mistakes; and some of their mistakes were grievous, and cost them dear. However, it must be borne in mind that there was no organised body that can rightly be called 'The Anabaptists', though, like so many authors, I am forced to write as though there were. Rather, there were thousands of individuals, several factions, and hundreds of separated churches all called Anabaptists, even though no coordinated, homogeneous body ever existed. What is more, their diversity was highly complex. Nor was it possible that these various churches and loose groupings could profess a universal, uniform faith. Also it has to be admitted, to put it bluntly, some adopted heretical views, especially on the person of Christ, and whether salvation depends on the grace of God or the so-called free will of man. Some Anabaptists were themselves intolerant of any dissent. Some spoke of the Reformers in a wild, harsh way, ignoring the vast amount of good which God accomplished through them.

Reader, I hope I have said enough to show you that I do not regard the Anabaptists as perfect. My opinion must be obvious. If I felt that the Anabaptists represented churches closest to the New Testament during the one hundred and twenty years I write of, my book would stop now! What is more, if we all became Anabaptists similar to the way they developed in the 16th century, Utopia would not be ushered in.

Having said that much, it is right to speak of the way the Anabaptists and the Reformers clashed over the connection between the State and the church, and to come to a judgement on it. On that issue, and other

connected matters, I have no hesitation in asserting that the Anabaptists were largely in the right, and the Reformers were largely in the wrong. I realise that this is a gross over-simplification of the subject, but a thorough examination of the point would demand another book!

To return to the kaleidoscope presented by the Anabaptists. Some of the fringe element were extremists and they brought much trouble upon the mainstream Anabaptists by their sinful and foolish antics. For example, in 1534 some of them took over the town of Munster, announced the end time had come, and committed horrible sins in the name of Christ. This was an appalling disaster for the Anabaptists as a whole, doing their cause – indeed the cause of God – much harm for many years. But Munster was not their only catastrophe in the 16th century. A later development led some of them to hold and teach defective views on the person of Christ. This again brought much abuse upon them, and many paid for their errors at the stake. All the same, it was wrong to blame all of them for the sins and excesses of a minority like the men of Munster, for instance. And, in any case, what a dreadful act, to burn men for erroneous beliefs! As the Anabaptists aptly remarked, this is no way to convert people! Even so, the Reformers found it very convenient to blacken the character of all the Anabaptists with the sins of a minority, or even with the excesses of the lunatic fringe, and it was a tactic often used throughout the time this book deals with. The unjust smear has been repeated very frequently ever since. All the Anabaptists were branded with the outrages of Munster, even though the evils were committed by only a few of them. And the cheap vilification was a great wrong! Sad to record, some critics to this day want to tar all Anabaptists with the brush of Munster.<sup>1</sup>

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However all that is to anticipate. We have got ahead of ourselves, somewhat. To go back to 1525...

Zwingli and the Zurich council were especially bitter against the Anabaptists. Such was the ferocity of the persecution which the authorities meted out, the ‘heretics’ had to flee. But there was precious little respite for them even in that. Wherever they went, the Reformers and the Papists were vehement in their persecution so that the ‘heretics’ were scattered again and again, driven homeless throughout Europe, being forced to seek temporary refuge wherever they could find it.

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<sup>1</sup> I am delighted to be able to record that there are signs of improvement in recent years. See my *Infant Baptism Tested* and my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

### *The Rise of the Anabaptists*

Nevertheless, yet again God was working out his purposes for his church. Because of the persecution they had to endure, the doctrine of the Anabaptists was heard throughout the entire Continent; Germany, Poland, Moravia, the Low Countries, Norway, Italy and England, all were drawn into the battle for the church. All these nations heard again the New Testament teaching on church life. It was similar to the experience of the early church, but instead of Saul, now it was Rome and the Reformers who were guilty:

At that time a great persecution arose against the church... and they were all scattered... Saul... made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4).

By this 16th-century scattering, thousands were forced to witness the savage persecution meted out to the Anabaptists, in addition to listening to their preaching, and watch their daily lives – thousands who might never have heard of them otherwise. Thus many flocked to join them, swelling their ranks massively as a direct result. Once again, by the will of God, those who opposed the New Testament teaching on the church actually contributed to their own downfall and to the advance of the church of Christ. The more the Anabaptists were ‘mown down’, the more they grew.

But, to put it mildly, the persecution was dreadful in the extreme. Men, women and *children* suffered agonies and torments beyond the power of words to describe. It is a wonder that flesh and blood could bear it. The Anabaptists were exiled, clapped in irons, kept barely alive on bread and water; they were tied together in chains, the first pushed into the river to drown, each pulling the next in to drown as he died. Many were burned at the stake; some were beheaded; others were branded; others had fingers torn off; some had their tongue pierced through with a stick, or cut out altogether; others had pieces of flesh ripped off with red hot pincers. Some were locked in their meeting houses and burned alive. And all because they would obey Christ as he has revealed his mind in Scripture. They would not baptise their infants, and they would form churches only out of regenerate men and women.

Reader, what do you say to this? What do you say of yourself in the light of such things? Are you obedient to Christ? Do you try to do all that he teaches you in his word? Or are you making excuses for disobedience? These Anabaptists put Christ before everything and everyone; they reckoned that obedience to their Saviour was their one chief concern in life. Although former friends turned against them, hated them and persecuted them, it did not hinder them in their obedience. To speak plainly – what tawdry excuses are often made for rank disobedience to

Christ these days. Too often it is a case of anything for a quiet life. Christ comes way down the list of priorities for a great many. Reader, what about you?

Listen to these words of Christ. You know them well enough I am sure, but let me remind you of them:

Therefore whoever confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it (Matt. 10:32-39).

These words apply to all things in the Christian faith. And this includes church life – your church life. What is your response to Christ, now?

\* \* \*

The first to be executed as an Anabaptist was Felix Manz. He died at the hands of the Zurich authorities under Zwingli. Manz was born the illegitimate son of a papist priest. He was well educated, a thorough Hebrew scholar, and versed in both Latin and Greek. Not only so, he was an eloquent preacher. In the early days at Zurich he was a firm friend of Zwingli and supported him in the reforms. In 1522, he began to question the notion of a State Church and the validity of infant baptism. Manz tried to help Zwingli see the teaching of the New Testament, but Zwingli broke with him. As explained above, it was at the house of Felix Manz that the first Anabaptist church was formed in January, 1525.

After that auspicious day, Manz engaged in preaching the gospel in the fields and in his mother's house. He was arrested and expelled from the town, but he was eventually brought back to be imprisoned at Zurich. He escaped with twenty others, and not long after he was reported to be baptising. The Reformed pastors tried to silence him, but he was resolute. He was arrested again, and accused that he had declared that 'he would seek out those who wished to accept Christ and follow his word, and he would unite with them by baptism'. For this, the death sentence was pronounced upon him:

Manz shall be delivered to the executioner, who shall tie his hands, put him into a boat, take him to the lower hut, there strap his bound hands down over

### *The Rise of the Anabaptists*

his knees, place a stick between his knees and arms, and thus push him into the water and let him perish in the water... his property shall also be confiscated...

\* \* \*

It is a cold, winter's afternoon about three o'clock, the 5th of January, 1527, and there is a keen, biting edge to the wind. The gate of the Wellenberg prison is thrown open, and Felix Manz is led on his last journey, past the fish market down to a waiting boat. He raises his voice and calls out to the crowds, preaching as he goes, praising God that, even though he is a sinner, he is privileged to die for the truth. His powerful voice declares, among other things, that believer's baptism is the only true baptism.

At last, Felix Manz reaches the river Limmat which flows swiftly and dark in the last light of the wintry afternoon as dusk closes in. The thronging crowds fall silent and still. They catch and hold their breath. A voice rings out across the water; a woman's voice. It is his mother who calls to him:

Remain true to Christ, my son... remain true to Christ. Do not yield to the temptation... do not yield...

The river bank falls silent once more as the echo of her words dies away. The sentence of death is read. Manz is put into the boat. His hands are tied over his knees. The block is thrust between his arms and legs. One last word! Manz cries out in Latin: 'Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit'. He is tied to a hurdle and thrown into the river. The dark, cold waters quickly surge over his head. Down, down he slides. Instinctively, he gasps for air. The struggle proves too much. The river flows gurgling on. Felix Manz is dead. He has proved that his words to the town council were no idle boast:

I hereby resolve that I will remain faithful to Christ, and put my trust in him who knows my every distress, and is mighty to deliver. Amen.

Felix Manz was only twenty-six years old when he gave his life in the conflict for the recovery of the New Testament church. I have no doubt that in his death he experienced the truth of his own words in a richer and fuller sense than ever before:

*With gladness will I sing now;  
My heart delights in God,  
Who showed me such forbearance,  
That I from death was saved  
Which never hath an end.  
I praise thee, Christ in heaven,  
Who all my sorrow changed.*

## *'Strike, Wound, Cut Asunder'*

God is my strength and power... He teaches my hands to make war...

2 Samuel 22:33-35

*London, 1526 – copies of the New Testament illegally imported – Tyndale at Little Sodbury – determined to translate the Scriptures – refusal by the Bishop of London – Tyndale makes a start – emigrates to the Continent to escape persecution – first copies finished and imported into England – the authorities try to stop it – their failure – the spread of the New Testament – Tyndale continues his work – his betrayal – his death*

The river Thames, London, in the year 1526. It was early spring and the wharves were a hive of activity. Tiny boats bobbed on the water as they plied busily between the great vessels moored along the jetties. A continual stream of men flowed to-and-fro across the gang-planks from the quays to the ships, whistling, shouting, shoving. They heaved huge bags of corn out of the holds of the merchant-men, thrusting their shoulders under the bulging sacks, then staggered across the planks to stack them into the warehouses which towered precariously above the water. A weak sun broke through the ragged clouds and cast a watery haze over the river.

The months of the past winter had been cruel in the extreme for the people of England. Though Henry was still on the throne, in reality death had been the undisputed master of the people for months. Master? Death had been a tyrant. Many had succumbed to his grim summons during the various outbreaks of disease which ravaged the country. Hundreds, thousands, had fallen like flies, seeing their resistance to sickness had been lowered through gnawing hunger brought on by famine. Thus dearth and pestilence had stalked the streets hand-in-hand, claiming their wretched victims without mercy. The harvest of the previous summer had been a disaster and London in particular suffered terrible starvation as a consequence. Bad enough, in all conscience! But it had been made far worse by the intrigues of Cardinal Wolsey, with his sly politics and false assurances. He even put a stop to all movement of the dwindling stocks of corn across England during the dark months and the people of London well-nigh perished as a result. So bitter was the resentment felt by the people, the Mayor of London threatened Wolsey with an uprising by the citizens – who had reached desperation point – unless something was done about it. Callous, shifty Wolsey responded with a yet another tissue of lies and false promises.

*'Strike, Wound, Cut Asunder'*

That was the reason why the wharves of the Thames were so busy in the spring of 1526. The German merchants and importers of London had taken the law into their own hands and shipped precious wheat from the Continent so that life-sustaining grain was beginning to pour into London at last. Hence the fevered activity on the wharves and in the warehouses along the river. Eager hands were bringing ashore the desperately needed supplies of food to rescue the starving thousands and save them from the iron grip of death.

Unknown to all but a few, however, many of the sacks did not carry only corn. Oh no! They held within them something far more valuable than grain. Cereal was needed to stave off physical hunger and deliver the people of England from physical death, yes. But the sacks contained copies of that one precious book which satisfies spiritual hunger, and shows men and women the way to be delivered from spiritual death, even from eternal death – namely, the Scriptures, the word of God. The bags of corn were the means whereby thousands of copies of a newly-printed version of the New Testament were being brought into England. Moreover, this version was special. It was special because, in a way, it was so very ordinary. The version carried in the sacks was not a translation written in the usual Latin. Nor was it Luther's recently-produced German rendering. This version was in English! It was William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament, fresh off the presses at Worms. It goes without saying that such a business was totally illegal. Tremendous risks were being run by all who were engaged in the traffic. Including death.

Tyndale was not the first, of course. In the 14th-century, Nicholas of Hereford, John Wycliffe and John Purvey had produced English translations based on the Latin Vulgate. This had been a tremendous leap forward. Nevertheless, those who read their work, and sought to obey it as God's word, being scornfully dubbed 'Bible men' by their enemies, suffered horrendous persecution.

Nearly a hundred and fifty years had passed since Wycliffe, however, when Tyndale produced his translation directly from the available texts in the original languages. This is how it happened. Three years before the above-mentioned feverish activity on the Thames, William Tyndale was a tutor in the Manor House at Little Sodbury in Gloucestershire. It was while he was there that he had taken the momentous decision. It would alter his life. Indeed it would end it! He came to the settled conviction that he must translate the Bible into English, so that every man in England could read the words of God for himself in his own native tongue. How did Tyndale arrive at this conclusion?

Tyndale, at the request of his patron, had previously started to expound the Scriptures, and within a short time large crowds attended his ministry,

finding great profit from his efforts. The Papists hated his preaching and its good effect upon the people. Nevertheless, they used his success to their own advantage, pulling up the good ears of spiritual corn which had grown out of his labours, and planting their own particular and peculiar brand of tares in their place. Tyndale was sorely grieved at this, despairing at the ignorance of the people brought about by their lack of the Scriptures in English. This despair aroused a vehement desire within him, stirring him to resolve to do something about it. He expressed himself in these words:

It is impossible to establish the... people in any truth, except the Scripture be plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue... If I could but translate the Bible, I would be more than a match for these priests, who are the enemies of all truth.

Furthermore, Tyndale brought trouble upon himself because the religious authorities were furious with him over his claim that the New Testament is the final court of appeal in all spiritual matters. The popish bigwigs hauled him before the Chancellor of the diocese, who ‘rated him as though he had been a dog’.

Through these and other sharp experiences, Tyndale became more and more convinced that ignorance of Scripture was the root cause of the spiritual confusion which abounded in England. The Papists had locked away God’s truth in a language not understood by the people, and by so doing had imprisoned millions of men and women in superstition and darkness. But the darkness did not lie heavily on the mind and heart only of the ordinary man in his cottage – the priests, too, were largely ignorant of the Scriptures. They were ‘blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the ditch’ (Matt. 15:14). The ditch was eternal damnation! Something had to be done about it! Luther had given the German people the New Testament in their own language; perhaps he, Tyndale, could attempt a similar thing for the people of England. In this way, he became convinced that he was called of God to do the very thing which was needed to open men’s eyes, and put an end to their darkness and confusion – he would translate the Scriptures into English.

He thought, prayed and debated much over this fateful step, for it was a mammoth undertaking. Not only that – it was a most dangerous thing to do. He would take his life in his hand if he started on the business. Nevertheless, he came to the settled conviction that come what may, however dangerous it might be for him personally, he must do it. Whatever it cost him in time, in energy, in... though it should cost him his life, he knew he had to try. Even if he should be put to death in the attempt. And the risk was very real.

The spiritual ignorance of the people, the papist darkness which enveloped England, cried out to him, infuriated him and moved him. He

was enraged at the contempt with which the priests treated the common people. On one occasion he had heard a Papist at his master's table declare that 'the pope's laws are better than God's'. Tyndale had retorted: 'I defy the pope and all his laws; if God spare my life, ere many years I will cause the boy that drives a plough shall know more of the Scripture than you do'.

Under the laws of England of those days, Tyndale needed the consent of a bishop to translate the Bible into English. With this in mind, he went to London where he tried to obtain this permission. It was denied him. In fact, he was given the 'cold shoulder' by Tunstall, Bishop of London. Tyndale was mortified. 'My God... O my God, fail me not; my last hope is in thee!', he cried.

God heard his prayer, and sent Tyndale support and help through the kindness of a wealthy merchant, Humphrey Monmouth. This good man also took into his home an assistant for Tyndale, one John Fryth, and they worked together in a common effort to get the New Testament translated into English.

Albeit, within a short time, vicious persecution broke out against the translators. So much so, Tyndale's friends pleaded with him to leave the country – both for his own safety and in order that he might carry on with his vital work. Looking back upon that time, Tyndale later explained that he 'understood... not only that there was no room in my Lord of London's palace to translate the New Testament, but that also that there was no place to do it in all England'.

Accordingly, in 1524 he left the country without permission from the king to set foot on the Continent. This in itself was contrary to the law of England. But he was determined to do whatever he could to carry out his intention to make sure that the ordinary Englishman could have a copy of the Bible which he could read for himself. Only if men were free of the power of the priests, could they ever be truly free. There was no greater work which Tyndale could do for the cause of God than to translate the Scriptures. By God's help, he would do it!

He studied hard, not sparing himself, in order to produce his translation, even though he was always in fear of his life and faced many difficulties and grievous setbacks. By the end of 1525, or early in 1526, the first copies of his New Testament came off the press, and were destined to reach England in the spring. It had been illegal for Tyndale to translate the Scriptures; it had been illegal for him to leave the country; and it was illegal for anyone to bring his translation into England. But Tyndale had obeyed the principle that when the laws of God and men clash, God must be obeyed rather than men (Acts 4:19-20 and 5:29).

However, it was one thing to translate the New Testament; it was hard enough to get it printed; but how *would* Tyndale get it into England and

into the hands of the people? The Bible must be read and preached for it to perform its work! How could he get it past the king's spies and the popish priests?

Great caution was needed, besides great ingenuity. Tyndale's New Testament had to be smuggled into England, and there were many difficulties and obstacles in the way. Nevertheless, God in his sovereignty brought this about through the immense traffic in corn at the time. Sacks of corn were being shipped into London from the near Continent in huge quantities in order to relieve the famine, the effects of which had been made worse by Cardinal Wolsey's interfering ways. And it was those very sacks which carried the precious cargo. Other copies were hidden in bales of cloth.

The king had already been warned that Tyndale had printed his version of the New Testament. Henry's ambassador in Spain, thoroughly awake to the progress of the work, had written to his master about the 'infection and danger' which would follow if the translation was not suppressed. Dreadful consequences would follow if the ordinary people could read the words of God for themselves! The Bible in English was not to be allowed. Tyndale and his work must be destroyed.

In spite of the vigilance of the authorities, however, copies of the New Testament in English did reach England by way of Antwerp and Rotterdam, and they did so in large numbers. Once ashore, the precious volumes did not stand quietly in musty warehouses gathering dust, but were quickly snapped up by men and women eager to read the word of God for themselves. This was much encouraged by the relatively low price of each copy, deliberately fixed so as to be affordable. In this way, from the Fellow in the university to the humble cottager, the people of England now had what they needed most of all – the Scriptures in their own mother tongue. Well, they had the New Testament, at least, to start with. By the help of God, Tyndale had accomplished what he had set out to do. The ploughboy could now read the word of God for himself. Everybody could be confronted with God's words directly, free of the interference of the priests with their fantastical glosses and corruptions. This included those many people who could not read or who were too poor to buy a copy for themselves, even at the lowest prices. Many got over the difficulty by clubbing together to purchase the book, and then getting someone to read it aloud to them. Multitudes in England obeyed Tyndale's exhortation when he bluntly told them to 'give diligence unto the words of eternal life'.

But, as many times before, the word of God was precious in those days. It was not unknown for a farmer to give a load of hay for a New Testament in English. How men and women in such a plight must have pored over the word of God and treasured it, like the 20th-century believers in the old

*'Strike, Wound, Cut Asunder'*

Communist countries who could only possess a page of Scripture by copying it on to disused cement bags.

Tyndale had no doubts about what was needed now. He wrote: ‘The Scribes and Pharisees had thrust up the sword of the word of God into a sheath of glosses, and therein had knit it fast, so that it could neither stick nor cut. Now, O God, draw this sharp sword from the scabbard. Strike, wound, cut asunder the soul and flesh, so that man, being divided in two, and set at variance with himself, may be in peace with thee to all eternity!’

The Bishop of London was bitter, complaining that the word of God in the common language of the people would ‘infect and contaminate’ them. He did all he could to clamp down on the activity of the booksellers. He preached against the translation, and symbolically burned it in a bonfire at St Paul’s, the king having decreed that the version must be destroyed by fire, and that all those who kept or read it must be punished.

But it was too late. More and more copies, even of pirate editions, were produced on the Continent, and smuggled into England where a ready market for the book existed. Nor was there any shortage of dealers who were willing to set out to satisfy the demand. Driven by the lure of colossal profits, many traders took dire risks, broke the law on a massive scale, and imported large quantities of Tyndale’s New Testament.

The authorities grew desperate. In 1527, the Archbishop hit on a novel scheme to halt the illegal traffic. He set up a fund, to which the bishops contributed, to buy as many copies as possible, and then destroy them by fire. God had made his enemies mad! This hare-brained scheme did not decrease the trade – it actually multiplied it! The profits of the merchants, the printers and the booksellers now soared, which in turn led to the printing of more and more copies. By this means, England was flooded with the New Testament in English.

God’s sovereign providence is wonderful. He used even the malice of his enemies to further his cause. They intended harm, ‘but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about...’ (Gen. 50:20). It was similar to the time when the Egyptians tormented, afflicted and persecuted the Hebrews, but ‘the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew’ (Exod. 1:12). As the Bible says: ‘Surely the wrath of man shall praise you’ (Ps. 76:10); and: ‘The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed... He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision’ (Ps. 2:2-4).

Tyndale did not rest on his laurels, but he determined to go on and translate the Old Testament, in addition to the New. So he carried on with his work on the Continent, while protected by sympathetic merchants in Antwerp, this being a free city. All the same, translating the Scriptures was

still a dangerous occupation. The country all around Antwerp was under the dominion of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, who hated the Englishman. Tyndale was relatively safe as long as he stayed in Antwerp. But if he once set foot outside...

Despite the threat hanging over him, Tyndale went on with his vital work. He revised his translation of the New Testament, and started on the Old, even though he was attacked, hunted and cheated. He suffered the most appalling setbacks and disappointments. Eventually, he was betrayed to the authorities, kidnapped, dragged out of Antwerp and imprisoned in the dungeon at Vilvorde, near Brussels, where he was detained for about eighteen months. Yet he did not give up his writing but struggled on, in spite of the hardships of the dungeon. He was very cold in winter; he was ill; he was in total darkness for hours at a stretch. Nevertheless still he laboured for the cause of God.

At long last, his miseries drew to a close. He was subjected to a mockery of a trial, inevitably pronounced guilty, degraded – expelled from ‘the priesthood’ – and sentenced to death as a heretic. On the 6th of October, 1536, the abominable sentence was carried out. He was first strangled with an iron chain around his neck, and then his body was burned to ashes where he stood, tied to the stake. His dying prayer was a petition for the king of England, that ‘God would open his eyes’.

Tyndale had struck a tremendous blow in the battle for the reform of the church. One of the reasons why Rome had managed to hold Europe in the grip of superstition through the long Dark Ages, was that the common people could not read the Scriptures for themselves. They had to rely on the priests to tell them what the Latin Bible said, even though many priests could not read the Latin for themselves! Gross ignorance and darkness indeed! Tyndale, by his labours, gave the people of England the opportunity to read the New Testament for themselves, and in so doing he greatly furthered the advance of the gospel in his home-land. And the people of England seized the opportunity he gave them. And seized it with both hands. Indeed it was heaven-sent! God had used Tyndale’s efforts – he did not labour in vain. His was a vital contribution in the struggle to recover New Testament church life.

What a challenge all this is. Reader, are you willing to go on with your work for God even though you do not see the full effect of it? Will you go on in spite of many disappointments and setbacks? Do not give up! Be encouraged by this history of Tyndale and remember along with him the men and women of Hebrews 11 who ‘all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them’ (Heb. 11:13). We know that ‘God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love... we desire that each one of you show the same diligence... until the

end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises' (Heb. 6:10-12).

Tyndale was dead! Rome had seemingly conquered once again, having crushed yet another saint who dared to stand against her tyranny. The translator could not go on with his work. Nevertheless, that was not the end of the story – other versions of the English Bible quickly followed, including those by Miles Coverdale and John Rogers. Both relied heavily on Tyndale's work, for their versions were practically his. Not only that – Tyndale's final prayer was answered, too, and quickly. King Henry actually decreed that a copy of an English Bible should be published, as long as it did not mention Tyndale's name! 'In God's name let it go abroad among our people', the king declared. The same Henry who had denounced Luther's translation only a few years before, was now enforcing the publication of the Scriptures!

More than that, it was not only the king's eyes that were opened. The people of England were enlightened on a large scale. So much so, in 1536 the authorities were compelled to acknowledge that the common people knew the Scriptures better than many of the bishops.

In 1538, Henry decreed that every parish church must display a chained copy of the Bible in English so that everyone could read it or, at the very least, hear it read in their own language. Then he went even further. In 1539, he decreed that the Bible should be freely available in English, and that the printers and booksellers now had full liberty to print and sell such copies. Tyndale's work had not been wasted. His life had not been sacrificed for nothing. His prayer had been answered. And the ploughboy did know God's word as Tyndale had vowed, years before, when he declared:

I defy the pope and all his laws; if God spare my life, ere many years I will cause the boy that drives a plough shall know more of the Scripture than you do.

Another victory had been gained in the long and bitter battle for the church. It had been won only at a great cost, it is true, but it had been achieved because God was working his purpose out. Rome's blood-stained fingers, once more, had been bent back. Her stranglehold on the people was being loosened. Tyndale's translation of the Bible into English for all the people, 'plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue', and the subsequent massive printing of it and later versions, was nothing short of a revolution. The printing of an affordable English Bible was vital to the further reform of the church. And, under God, this indispensable step had been taken by William Tyndale. All honour to his name.

## *Geneva*

A sword, a sword is sharpened and also polished!

Ezekiel 21:9

*Geneva, 1536 – Farel speaks to Calvin – Calvin changes his mind – becomes pastor – his views on Church and State – his Constantine position – contradicts himself – the practical effect of his views – the Libertines – Calvin’s vital distinction between preachers and pastors – his attempt at discipline of the Lord’s supper – banished – Rome grabs the chance – Calvin restored by popular demand – Presbyterianism – a biblical look at it under two questions – found wanting – separate churches, not federated congregations – self-governing churches, not ecclesiastical courts – Geneva the centre of the Reformation – Calvin’s great works – his mistaken notion of a ‘Christian State’ – his responsibility for the harm caused – persecution by the Calvinists – Servetus – the terrible cost – Calvin’s greatness – his death – the pope’s testimony*

It is the end of August, 1536. A young Frenchman, slim in figure and pale of countenance, who is on his way from Italy to Strasbourg, reaches the city of Geneva, accompanied by his brother and half-sister. The young man intends to rest from his journey and move on next morning. He will stay for the one night only.

In his early days, the young man had started on a course of preparation for the Roman Catholic priesthood, but he had changed direction and trained as a lawyer. At that time he had an ‘obdurate attachment to papistical superstitions’, but while a student he was converted to Christ. Having come to saving faith, he soon became a leader among the believers in Paris, where he quickly gained a reputation for learning. His strenuous efforts for the gospel led to stern resistance by the Papists. So much so, he left Paris, and had been constantly on the move ever since.

For all that, in spite of his unsettled circumstances, the young man had not been idle. He had written and published books on behalf of the Reformed faith, including a slim volume on the doctrines of the gospel. This had been published in Basle in March, 1536. The world was destined to hear a great deal more of this little volume. It was his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

It is in the summer of 1536 that this French scholar and writer arrives at Geneva intending to stay for the one night. He had not meant to visit Geneva at all – he has only come to the city because of a forced detour, his chosen road having been blocked by the Emperor’s army. The visitor is

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eager to travel on to Strasbourg, looking forward to its relative peace and safety which will enable him to carry on his studious work for the gospel.

This unintended stop in Geneva will have far-reaching consequences. He does not know it, but the scholar's plans are about to be drastically altered, and altered overnight! Geneva, not Strasbourg, is the city where his great life's work will be done. The young man's name is John Calvin. God is going to use him to strike another mighty blow against Popery. Another decisive stage in the battle for the church is about to be fought and won.

There is another Frenchman in the city that day, one William Farel. Farel is twenty years older than Calvin, and he has been the instrument which God has used to bring Geneva into the liberty of the gospel. A fiery preacher, fearless and eloquent, Farel has suffered much abuse in the city on account of his powerful sermons, but he has continued with the help of God, and he has seen the gospel triumph over his enemies. On the 21st of May, 1536 – a few weeks before this day in August – the citizens of Geneva had assembled and sworn to renounce Rome and all her doctrines, the Mass and all its superstitions, and to live according to the gospel. The civil authorities had marked this signal step by a symbolic change in the city motto. Formerly it had read: *I hope for light after darkness*. Now it boldly asserts: *Post tenebras, lux – After darkness, light*.

When Calvin arrives in Geneva as an overnight visitor, Farel is actively engaged in putting the people's resolution into practical effect. Farel is in a quandary, however; indeed, he is more than puzzled. He is very uneasy and worried, for he is only too well aware that his abilities are severely limited. Geneva needs a man who is better able to teach the gospel than he! The crying need is for one who is able to teach it clearly, systematically and powerfully. The cause of God must be soundly established and thoroughly built up. Farel has no illusions, he does not deceive himself; he has his gifts but he is not the man for that great work. He lacks the knowledge, the authority, the teaching ability and the mental power required for such a task. News reaches him that John Calvin is come to the city. True, only on a passing and fleeting visit. Nevertheless, Calvin is in Geneva. What is more, Calvin's reputation has gone before him.

Farel calls on the visitor without delay. The two Frenchmen talk together. They discuss the Reformation. Farel tells Calvin about its progress in Geneva but he also speaks of his fears for the future and he asks Calvin to stay and take up the challenge. Farel appeals to the younger man to throw in his lot with him; he tells him it is the turning-point for Geneva; he points out the wonderful opportunity which exists to teach the gospel in the city. Farel speaks bluntly; he tells Calvin that he is the man for the job. He is God's man! This is God's hour!

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Calvin listens with due and proper respect for the older man but he cannot agree to Farel's request. Shaking his head, he refuses bluntly and resists all the appeals which Farel can muster. He is determined to go on to Strasbourg and take up his work there. He is not the man for stormy dispute nor for the public quarrels he would have to face in Geneva.

The fiery Farel grows desperate. It is all so plain to his mind. Calvin is the man, the very man. He must stay. He must! Is Calvin refusing to stay? Then he is refusing God, not Farel! This is wrong. This is sinful. He must stay. Farel can hold his tongue no longer. 'God will curse your work... if you prefer it to that of Christ', he thunders. The atmosphere is electric as the echo of Farel's words dies away. He can do no more...

Calvin hesitates. He longs for the peace and tranquillity of Strasbourg, but he senses that God is speaking to him through the other man. Calvin is persuaded that it is God's mind which is being made known to him. He is terrified of the thought of the curse which has just been pronounced upon him if he rebels against God, persists in his determination to go to Strasbourg, and turns his back upon Geneva. When Calvin later looked back upon this occasion, he described Farel's words as 'a fearful adjuration... as if God from on high had stretched out his hand to stop me'. Calvin's resistance breaks down, he is conquered. He yields. He holds out his hand. Farel grips it warmly. The decision is taken. Calvin will not go back on it. From now on the destinies of John Calvin and Geneva are inseparably linked.

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Thus Calvin stayed in Geneva, but he declined the office of pastor at first, though he did agree to preach the gospel in the city. In this he met with immediate success. Furthermore, within a month he proved his worth in a dispute with the Papists concerning the Lord's supper. He was elected pastor a month later. He then went on to draw up a Confession of Faith which was approved and adopted by the city council in the November. A catechism followed.

Since Farel and Calvin both believed in the Constantine system of Church and State government, the civil and spiritual authorities of Geneva were joined together. The preachers preached and taught the gospel, while the council enforced it by means of its system of laws and punishments. This legal enforcement included the worship of God, the government of the church and the moral behaviour of the citizens of Geneva – all came under the regulation of the Church and State. A 'Christian Republic' was thereby established. The Anabaptists and their views, naturally, were abhorrent to the Reformers. Calvin dismissed them as the 'enemies of God and of humankind [who] desire to usher in anarchy'.

### ***Calvin's views on Church and State***

It is necessary to say just a little more on Calvin's attitude to the relationship between the Church and the State. As with Luther, having set out Calvin's principles, we then shall look at his practice. The fact is, like Luther, Calvin was ambiguous and inconsistent in his views on this vital question. This must sadden but not surprise us – after all he was but a man. Unfortunately, there are those who tend to view Calvin as almost verging on the infallible, and some things which have been written about his views and his so-called 'wisdom' lean towards the sycophantic, and are wrong and dangerous.

But it is far worse than that. Men have actually tried to put into practice – in a political way – the tenets and teaching of Calvin on the State, and much harm has resulted. To speak frankly, Calvin in this respect was enmeshed in the approach of Constantine, and thus acted contrary to the New Testament in the matter. He based his views very, very heavily on the practice of Israel in the Old Testament, and thus he made wrong deductions which he then misapplied to the life of the Church and State. These in turn would be to a measure put in force in Holland, Scotland, Colonial America of the 17th and 18th centuries and in South Africa in the 20th century. Calvin, and some of his followers since, fostered the mistaken idea of a 'Christian State'.

Men still misread these matters. In a book review in the February, 1994, edition of *The Banner of Truth*, the following statement appeared: 'It is ironical that the [18th century] evangelical revival in America did most to break down the Puritan emphasis on a Christian State'. The reviewer went on to refer to the 'debate as to whether the First Amendment separating Church and State was an Enlightenment or a Christian measure'. It would seem that some people to this day are convinced that a Christian State is a scriptural concept. Some men, it has to be said, view the idea of a Christian State with relish, and to speak against it can be accounted anti-Christian in their eyes. Is this right?

There is no doubt whatsoever about it. There is no debate at all. As I have explained in previous chapters, it was Constantine who united the Church and State. This system was continued by Calvin and practiced by many of his followers. But this system is absolutely contrary to the New Testament, where the church and the State are separate. As I have already stated, this was to be one of the great battle-fields of the next one hundred years in the reformation of the church. As can be seen by the above quote, the battle is still being fought. I shall return to the wrong-headed notion of 'a Christian State' later, when I shall also tackle, briefly, the misuse of the Old Testament which gives rise to it.

However, I must now offer some justification for my assertion that Calvin was ambiguous and even self-contradictory in his views of the State and the Church. It is true that in his *Institutes* he said that ‘the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things very widely separated’. So far, so good. This is New Testament teaching. If only Calvin and his followers had held on to it. In the same vein he also wrote, in his commentary on Romans 13:1-7 which deals with the powers, duties and rights of magistrates, that ‘this whole discourse is concerning civil government; it is therefore to no purpose that they who would exercise dominion over consciences do hence attempt to establish their sacrilegious tyranny’. Again, this is excellent. If only Calvin and all the other Reformers had stuck to it. Calvin also taught that the church must discipline its members in a spiritual way. This, too, is pure New Testament teaching.

But, in the light of this, what can we make of Calvin on the power of the magistrate, as he expressed it in his *Institutes*? There he said that the responsibility of the magistrate extends to both tables of the law – even ‘beginning with religion and divine worship’. Here is a contradiction. In one place he said the magistrate’s authority is civil; in another he said it concerns ‘religion and divine worship’. Which is it? He went on to say:

That no polity can be successfully established unless piety be its first care, and that those laws are absurd which disregard the rights of God, and consult only for men. Seeing then that among philosophers religion holds the first place, and that the same thing has always been observed with the universal consent of nations, Christian princes and magistrates may be ashamed of their heartlessness if they make it not their care... this office is specially assigned to them by God, and indeed it is right that they exert themselves in asserting and defending the honour of him whose vice-regents they are... Hence in Scripture holy kings are especially praised for restoring the worship of God when corrupted or overthrown, or for taking care that religion flourished under them in purity and safety. On the other hand, the sacred history sets down anarchy among the vices, when it states that there was no king in Israel, and, therefore, everyone did as he pleased (Judg. 21:25). This rebukes the folly of those who would neglect the care of divine things, and devote themselves merely to the administration of justice among men; as if God had appointed rulers in his own name to decide earthly controversies, and omitted what was of far greater moment, his own pure worship as prescribed by his law.

It can be readily seen that one set of quotations contradicts the other. In one place the magistrate must concern himself with civil matters only; in another, religion, worship and piety are his first and chief responsibility. I ask again: Which is it? It is a sad fact that Calvin was equivocal and even contradictory in his views on this matter.

Worse than that, Calvin did not only contradict himself; he contradicted the New Testament. His reference to *nations* and *Christian princes* gave the game away. He was writing from the viewpoint of Constantine, not the New Testament, when he wrote those words, though he would not have admitted it. Further, it will be observed that Calvin could not support his thesis – that the magistrate should regulate religion and worship – by any reference to the New Testament. It was all to do with the holy kings and judges of Israel. If the *Institutes* are consulted this misguided premise becomes even more evident. Thus Calvin's argument was based upon a wrong foundation. I shall return to this matter of the misuse of the Old Testament at a later stage,<sup>1</sup> but for now I assert that the church of Jesus Christ is not to be organised according to the political and military conditions which applied only to Israel in the Old Testament. I assure you, reader, I do not undermine the Old Testament when I say this. But the church and the nation of Israel are very different bodies. Political power must never be used to enforce religion in the gospel age. Whenever Constantine theories (and Calvin's views) on religious uniformity have been applied and enforced politically, disaster has ensued. What streams of blood have been shed, all because of Constantine. Strictly speaking, according to Calvin's view, anyone who blasphemes or worships idols, or breaks any of the ten commandments, ought to be put to the sword by the magistrate. Nor is this an idle speculation. I shall soon come to Michael Servetus. And 20th-century 'Reconstructionism'.

In the *Institutes*, Calvin said that civil government 'is assigned... to foster and maintain the external worship of God, to defend sound doctrine and the condition of the church'. He dismissed the Anabaptists as stupid fanatics because they argued that these matters are the business of the church, not the civil authorities. Nevertheless, Calvin was wrong; they were right.

On 'Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers' (Isa. 49:23), Calvin totally misapplied the verse to the church when, ridiculously, he wrote:

'Kings' and 'queens' shall supply everything that is necessary for nourishing the offspring of the church... the Lord has bestowed on them authority and power to defend the church and to promote the glory of God... kings, who had been converted to God by the preaching of the gospel, obtained this highest pinnacle of rank, which surpasses dominion and principality of every sort, to be 'nursing-fathers' and guardians of the church... removing superstitions and putting an end to all wicked idolatry... advancing the kingdom of Christ and maintaining purity of doctrine... purging scandals and cleansing from the filth

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<sup>1</sup> See my *Infant Baptism Tested* and my forthcoming book on the law, where I fully work out my position.

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that corrupts piety... We ought to hope for a restoration of the church, and such a conversion of kings that they shall show themselves to be ‘nursing-fathers’ and protectors of believers, and shall bravely defend the doctrine of the word.

On John 18:36, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight’, Calvin said:

But here a question arises, Is it not lawful to defend the kingdom of Christ by arms? For when kings and princes are commanded to kiss the Son of God (Ps. 2:10-12), not only are they enjoined to submit to his authority in their private capacity, but also to employ all the power that they possess, in defending the church and maintaining godliness... They who draw this conclusion, that the doctrine of the gospel and the pure worship of God ought not to be defended by arms, are unskilful and ignorant reasoners... Though godly kings defend the kingdom of Christ by the sword, still it is done in a different manner from that in which worldly kingdoms are wont to be defended; for the kingdom of Christ, being spiritual, must be founded on the doctrine and power of the Spirit... yet this does not hinder princes from accidentally defending the kingdom of Christ; partly, by appointing external discipline, and partly, by lending their protection to the church against wicked men.

Well, this is nothing other than a clear case of arguing black is white. Christ said that his kingdom is not advanced or defended by the sword; Calvin promptly argued the exact opposite! And what he attributed to ‘unskilful and ignorant reasoners’, came from the lips of Christ himself! In addition, as for Calvin’s distinction that there is a difference when the fight is to defend the Church and not the State – what difference would it make to you, reader, if, as the point of the sword pierced your body, the man at the other end told you he was going to plunge it home in defence of the Church and not an earthly kingdom? Precious little difference, I suspect. This defence of Constantine thinking is utter twaddle, even though it came from the lips and pen of Calvin. Unfortunately, as the course of the history opens out, we shall see the wicked effect of this kind of teaching time and time again. And the effect was horrendous.

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To get back to where we left off: Although things had started so well, it was not long before Calvin and Farel met stern opposition to their reforms from some of the citizens, especially from the so-called Libertines – those who demanded freedom to live as they pleased. Actually they wanted licence, not liberty. These Libertines resisted Calvin’s preaching and discipline with carnal vigour. They snapped: ‘It was his place to explain the Scriptures... What right had he to meddle with other things, to talk about morals and find fault?’

But of course preachers have to apply the Scriptures to the everyday life of the hearers. That ought to be self-evident. The fault lay with the Libertines, and their words reveal an attitude which is always a danger for professing Christians. We can like listening to the doctrinal explanation of the gospel as a kind of intellectual exercise, but hate the pointed application of it to our lives. Never more so than today, when we are in danger of treating gospel preaching as a spectator sport, and when we have even reached the stage where we have our ‘fixture-lists’ and our ‘star-players’. Listening to a sermon is fast becoming a Christian hobby or entertainment. Thousands of sermons are now available at the click of a mouse. We can tune-in to our favourite preacher on a tape while ‘gardening’ (as one well-known catalogue puts it), or while driving the car, or as spiritual ‘wall-paper’ music! What are we about? There is something dreadfully wrong in this, surely. This is not the way to treat the preached word of God. Reader, what is your view of this? Sitting back as we hear God’s truth, treating it as a pastime, is wicked. It misses the point dreadfully. When God’s word is being preached, it is a very serious business. There is far more to it than a mere intellectual hearing.

At all events, as Calvin discovered, men do not like the practical application of Scripture to their lives. Often we do not! Matthew Henry: ‘Many will commend the wit of a sermon, that will not be commanded by the divine laws of a sermon’. The calls of the preacher for us to obey and carry out our duty upon the basis of the doctrine of Scripture can be too much for us. Those preachers who deal pointedly and plainly with us are called ‘aggressive’ and ‘offensive’. Reader, what do you think of this? Oh, for more ‘aggressive’ preachers! Paul knew that it was vital for him – as all preachers – to preach ‘boldly’; that is, without reserve, freely, openly, frankly and with a fearless courage. He also felt the temptation to preach in a way which fell short of that. Hence his earnest and repeated request for prayer that he might not fail (Eph. 6:18-20).

Listen to Calvin again. ‘We see that the majority furiously reject the gospel’, he declared. True enough. But he was concerned about others who, though they did not openly reject the gospel, nevertheless set themselves against the preached word of God. Calvin went on:

As to the others who pretend to welcome the gospel, what sort of obedience do they render to it? There is so much contempt and so much pride, that, as soon as vices are reproved, or more sharpness is used than suits the taste of those who would wish to have full permission to act wickedly... they are filled with spite... They who openly declare that they wish for the reformation of the gospel cannot endure to be reproved when it is necessary, but gnash their teeth against God... but if we teach them faithfully in the name of God, and for their salvation, they are so fastidious that a single word will provoke them to rebellion; and if we persevere in doing our duty, war will be immediately

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declared. Would to God that these things were not so visible among us as they are!

I would merely add, when men reject the messenger they often intend to reject the message itself; and, above all, they wish to reject the one who sent the message in the first place. Samuel found it so (1 Sam. 8:7). Calvin's words challenge us. We say we want full reform in our churches – but do we? How do we react when strong preaching reproves us? How much real reform is there in our churches? How deep does it go?

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The spiritual battle in Geneva was joined in earnest. Calvin was under no illusions about it when he wrote: 'We are exposed to the most serious difficulties... The greater number are inclined to look upon us as preachers rather than pastors. Oh, what a difficult thing the rebuilding of the church will be. We shall have to struggle against all the worst passions of flesh and blood!'

Observe Calvin's subtle but important distinction which illustrates the application just made. He said that the majority of the people liked preachers; they did not like pastors. In other words, they wanted their ministers to avoid the practical outcome and application of their expositions when they preached. Calvin was making a vital point which is relevant to this day. The people appreciated the theory of the gospel, but not the obedience which it involves and demands. They did not like the discipline of the word. They wanted their ministers to expound the truth, but to keep their hands off their lives. Whenever this is done, however – and it is done – ministers are not really preaching. It is not the excellence of exposition which counts ultimately; nor even good listening. It is the lasting effect of the gospel in our lives which is the important thing. Sinners must be converted; saints must be edified and sanctified. At least, this must be the aim. Preaching which stops short of these ends has not fulfilled its proper function. Mere academic interest and delight in a clear, orthodox exposition is not enough. In connection with this, notice also that Calvin knew what the priority was – it was 'the rebuilding of the church'. He clearly linked church life and preaching. This is another vital aspect of the matter. It is possible to separate the two and this is being done in our generation. Much preaching today exists in a limbo state, divorced from church life, and this can cause extensive damage. I shall say more on the question in the chapter entitled 'The Cambridge Wonder'.

Calvin realised that although church reformation would be very difficult to bring about, it was essential. Showing much moderation, he went as far as he could to maintain peace without compromising the gospel, but the matter was further complicated when two Anabaptists

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arrived in the city. The immoralities of Munster were still fresh in men's minds, and consequently Geneva was thrown into turmoil. The Anabaptists were banished, but even so the spiritual battle within the city raged on.

The climax was reached in 1538, when Calvin and Farel refused to administer the Lord's supper to the Libertines. It will be recalled that this was the very area where Luther ran into trouble. For this act of spiritual discipline, the two Reformers were censured by the council, which told Calvin that he must preach no more. In spite of this, the two men resolved together to disobey the council's edict. They would carry on preaching. When it was announced that they would be in their pulpits, dense crowds flocked to hear them. Neither man yielded to the Libertine demands, but each preached directly, plainly and to the point at issue. For this they were banished from the city, being given three days in which to quit the place. Calvin replied that he was glad that he was not the servant of man. He said: 'If we had served man this would be a bad return, but we serve a great master who will reward us'.

He could not compromise the gospel. He would not! He knew that he would have to answer to God for his actions. God he feared, the city council he did not. He wrote:

When I had to administer [the Lord's supper], I was tortured by anxiety for the state of the souls for whom I should one day give an account before God; there were many whose faith seemed to me uncertain, nay doubtful, and yet they all thronged to the table of the Lord without distinction. I cannot tell you with what torments my conscience was beset, day and night.

How these searching words need to be pondered today. What lightness, what flippancy there is in so many churches in our generation. Too often, indiscipline is the mark of the so-called worship of God, and of the observance of the ordinances of Christ. Our consciences must be as awake, they must be as alert, as Calvin's was. This applies to the elders of the churches especially, of course, but not only to the elders – it applies to all the members. What paltry excuses are frequently offered for slackness and superficiality in the churches of today; what a passing of responsibilities! Discipline of the Lord's table is lax in many churches and non-existent in some. Do the elders in particular, and the members in general, not have a conscience as spirited as Calvin's? Reader, what of you and your church in this regard?

So despite two years' work by Calvin, in 1538 it seemed as though the battle for the reforming and rebuilding of the church in Geneva had been lost. The Libertines had triumphed, and Calvin had been defeated. The city council banished him, and he quietly left the city, went to Strasbourg as he had planned in the beginning, where he now lectured daily as a professor of theology and preached four times a week. He suffered great hardship by

this banishment, and was reduced to poverty, even to the extent of selling his precious books to keep himself. Obedience to Christ can prove costly. Reader, are you prepared to pay the price? Or do you value ease and popularity above the gospel?

Ever alert, Rome looked on the events in Geneva with eager eyes. She saw and quickly seized her chance to grasp the advantage granted to her by Calvin's enforced absence from the city. By fawning flattery and specious allurements, the Papists wormed their way back into a position of influence with the council. They attacked Calvin as a criminal, and said that he stood condemned before the judgement seat of God.

Calvin did not shirk the heat of battle; he took up the challenge and replied in ringing tones. He asked: 'I saw the gospel stifled by superstition – what was I to do?' He looked upon it all in terms of the spiritual warfare it really was. He argued that when he had been invited to stay and work in Geneva, he had found the church there like an army with her soldiers scattered and confused. All that he had tried to do was to raise the 'old banner of Jesus Christ' in order to rally the Lord's hosts. For his defence and vindication he appealed to God, saying: 'For it is not a new and strange ensign which I have unfurled, but thy noble standard, O Lord'.

The battle raged on in Geneva, and at last it turned once more into the favour of the Reformed faith. In 1540, the council sent word to Calvin that they wanted him back in Geneva as their minister. He hesitated. But he felt that God was calling him back. He said:

When I recall the life that I led in that place, I tremble to the very depths of my soul at the thought of returning... but I felt that my hands and my feet were bound to that city by the will of God... the more I am inclined to recoil with terror from this task, the more I mistrust myself... I will never forsake the church of Geneva, which is dearer to me than my life.

He received news that the people were deeply grieved over the destitution of the church in the city and longed for his return. Calvin gave way. He wrote: 'As the Lord is my witness, I submitted with sorrow, tears, great solicitude and anxiety. Not my will, O God, but thy will be done. I offer my heart as a sacrifice to the Lord'. He returned to the city on the 12th of September, 1541, this time with honour bestowed upon him and his reputation cleared. The people were truly sorry that they had abused him. It is recorded that 'they acknowledged their faults, and were hungering and thirsting for the words of their faithful pastor, so they ceased not to importune until he had been induced to return'.

Calvin took up his system of reforms where he had left off. The pity is, the civil authority of the magistrates, and the spiritual authority of the church, were still combined to enforce the gospel under his leadership. This included both doctrine and practice. This, of course, as I have made

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clear, came from Constantine and not the New Testament. It was a dreadful mistake.

Presbyterianism was the form of church government which Calvin established in Geneva. This was a most important development and played a very large part in the process of the full recovery of New Testament church life out of the corruptions of the Papacy. In this system, each congregation elects its own rulers or elders, and these govern the church in a body known as the Session. The teaching elder and one ruling elder from each of the Sessions then form part of the Presbytery as the next highest church court. This in turn is answerable to the Synod. This leads on to the General Assembly – the final ruling body of the congregations.

Calvin instituted a fourfold ministry within the church of Geneva – the pastor who preached, the teacher who catechised and lectured, the elders who ruled the congregation, and the deacons who looked after the material cares of the church. All this was a tremendous advance upon the papal system. In the Roman Church, authority is exercised by the pope through a chain of command comprising cardinals, archbishops, bishops and priests, by means of Councils, binding papal Bulls and decrees. The Church of England retains this notion of hierarchy with its threefold order of ministers, ranked in a descending line of authority – bishops, presbyters (priests) and deacons. Presbyterianism certainly rediscovered and put in place the New Testament practice of equality among presbyters or elders, and it removed the notion of hierarchy among ministers, but unfortunately it kept it in place through its system of church courts. In contrast, the Anabaptists had removed all notion of hierarchy right from the inception of their churches.

The question of church organisation would prove to be a battle ground which would be much fought over in the coming years. Calvin introduced Presbyterianism at Geneva. Was he right? Is this the pattern and order of the New Testament churches? The Anabaptists, in the early days especially, regarded their churches as entirely separate, independent and self-governing. ‘No type of connectionalism existed among the autonomous congregations of Anabaptists, with the exception of the Hutterites, until Menno (Simons) reorganised the Mennonites into a more centralised form of church government’, sums up their practice. Calvin’s system was, and is, very different to that. But the question remains: Is it biblical?

### *A look at Presbyterianism*

Presbyterians attempt to justify their church organisation on scriptural grounds, but I assert that their arguments are exceedingly weak. There are

two main points to consider. *First*, are churches, according to the New Testament, single, separate churches, composed of one congregation only? Or, as the Presbyterians claim, is each church made up of several congregations? *Secondly*, are individual churches self-governing? Or, as the Presbyterians claim, are they linked together under a system of ecclesiastical courts?

**(a) Single, separate churches – or several congregations?**

As for the first question, is each church made up of several congregations, as Presbyterians claim? They make use of two main arguments. *First*, they argue from the church at Jerusalem, and – to a lesser extent – the churches at Ephesus and Corinth, and so on. *Secondly*, they argue from Acts 9:31.

Their claim is that since the early chapters of Acts show that there were large numbers of converts from various countries on the Day of Pentecost and after, and since there were several ministers living in Jerusalem at the time, then the one church in Jerusalem – and it is called ‘the church’ in the Acts – the one church must have been composed of many congregations.

In reply, it is readily agreed that large numbers were converted at Pentecost and subsequently. It is also agreed that the church in Jerusalem, until the persecution recorded in Acts 8, was very large in size. And it is difficult to see how that many believers could have assembled conveniently in one place. All this is agreed.

But it is a huge leap to argue from this that the one church organised itself into stated and distinct congregations. There is not the slightest evidence that this was the case. It is grossly unwarranted for Presbyterians to argue that the church ‘must of necessity have constituted several congregations’, as James Bannerman put it. His choice of words is very important. Notice his ‘must... have’. This is the key. ‘Must have’ means that Bannerman was speculating, drawing an inference. He could not say that it was definitely so. No one can, because we are not told that this is what happened. Presbyterians argue their case by inference and speculation. As Bannerman also said: ‘The conclusion... seems to be inevitable’. Note, it ‘seems to be’. It cannot be proved by direct quotation. It cannot be proved, full stop!

Presbyterians, according to *The Form of Church Government* drawn up in the Westminster Assembly and approved in 1645, also argue that since a number of different countries were represented among the converts in Jerusalem, these would have formed separate congregations within the one church. It ‘doth argue more congregations than one in that church’ is the claim. The church at Ephesus is treated similarly. But once again this is pure speculation. There is not the slightest proof for it.

Yet despite this lack of direct support, despite the complete absence of direct scriptural evidence for the church being made up of several

congregations, the Westminster Confession was quite dogmatic that it is so. ‘Many particular congregations may be under one presbyterial government’, it said. It claimed – without a blush – that ‘this proposition is proved’. This is certainly a gross overstatement. On the basis of the scriptural evidence supplied by the Confession, the most that can be said is that the proposition is speculated or inferred, and that but feebly. As an example of the scriptural authority which is offered as the ‘proof’, take Acts 20:31. This verse is chosen to ‘prove’ that there were several congregations at Ephesus. But how does this text prove the proposition? It reads: ‘Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears’. How this can be regarded as proof that the one church was composed of several congregations is baffling, to say the least. Such, however, is the quality of the ‘proof’. Reference is also made to those texts which speak of the success of the gospel at Ephesus, that both Jews and Greeks were converted, that a church existed in the home of Aquila and Priscilla, and others. The sum of which is, according to the Confession: ‘All which laid together, doth prove that the multitude of believers did make more congregations than one in the church of Ephesus...’.

This is wrong. It proves nothing of the sort. Notice the reference to the church in the home. Observe that the scriptural way of speaking of it is to call it a church (1 Cor. 16:19), and not *a congregation within a church*. It was a church in its own right, not a congregation within the Ephesus church. (See also Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15; Philem 2). What is more, to suggest that Jews and Greeks formed separate congregations is utterly wrong. It goes flatly against the principle of Ephesians 2:11-22, where Paul gloried that the gospel has broken down the barrier between Jew and Greek. Christ has made both one and they were being built together for a habitation for God, built together into one habitation. The suggestion that they would now divide into two distinct congregations on the basis of race is not only guesswork, it is repulsive. Presbyterians may favour national churches, ‘white’ or ‘black’ churches, Jewish or Greek or Chinese churches, and all the rest of it, but the New Testament will not countenance this kind of talk. It is wrong. In Acts 6:1-7, when conflict between races erupted within the church, the apostles did not suggest that the various nationalities should form separate congregations! The Westminster Confession may use the word ‘prove’ when it claims that churches are made up of several congregations. I think not. Far from it.

While, as we have seen, Bannerman was, like the Westminster Confession, very definite in his presumptions, Louis Berkhof was much more restrained. Wisely and cautiously, he said: ‘It is not impossible that the church of Jerusalem and the church of Antioch in Syria also comprised

several groups that were accustomed to meet in different places'. This is better. Though a Presbyterian himself, Berkhof would not say the Presbyterian case was proved – he could not! Rather, 'it was not impossible'. But to leap from this inference or lack of impossibility to a fully-fledged Presbyterian system, and to say it is categorically proved and established, as some Presbyterians do, is totally unjustified. There is no New Testament evidence for it. What are we told about the organisation of these separate congregations into one church? What evidence is there of their synods and classes? What assemblies are we told of – when all the elders from all the separate congregations assembled to decide the government of the church in Jerusalem or Ephesus? There is not a single word!

The point is, in the early days the church at Jerusalem was, in any case, unique. The apostles were all living there, and the ordinary constitution of the church as ruled by elders had not been established – this not being mentioned until Acts 14:23 (or, possibly, Acts 11:30). The early chapters of Acts are unique as far as church organisation goes. It was a transitional time because of the apostolic presence in the church. It must also be remembered that when the church in Jerusalem was formed, it was the only church in the world. As more converts were added to it, nothing would be more natural than for the believers to emphasise the concept of one universal church – the church in Jerusalem. There was no other. It was only through the pressure of circumstances, brought about by persecution and successful church planting, that the ordinary New Testament system of separate churches began to take over. This is what happened through the middle chapters of the Acts. Presbyterians are wrong to base their claims for church organisation upon the unique conditions of Jerusalem in the very early days of the church age, especially since nearly all their claims are nothing more than conjecture anyway.

As for Acts 9:31, the text is disputable from a manuscript point of view. Is it 'the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria', or is it 'the church throughout all Judea...'? If the former, then the Presbyterians have no support here for their claim that the various congregations throughout the region formed one church. Acts 9:31 teaches there were several distinct churches throughout the region, that is all.

But if the text should read, 'the church throughout Judea...', meaning that there were several congregations which formed one church in the region, then it is the only place in Scripture where the word is so used. Now there are over a hundred references to the church in the New Testament. The overwhelming use of the word is for a local church, a specific church such as the church of God at, in, or of Corinth, Ephesus, Smyrna... (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 2:1; Rev. 2 and 3), the church of the

Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 2:1), or the churches of Galatia or Judea (Gal. 1:2,22). The only other use of the word is for the whole company of believers, the entire body of the elect (Eph. 5:23-27, for example). The word is never used as one church made up of several congregations (unless in this disputed text, Acts 9:31). It is never used for a building. It is never used as in *The Baptist Church* or *The Presbyterian Church*. It is never used for territorial or national purposes – *The Church of England*, for instance. It is always the church at Corinth, the church of Ephesus, the churches of Galatia. In other words, it speaks of the individual churches which exist in a place – never one national or regional Church composed of linked churches. It is never *The Church of Galatia*, never one church made up of several churches or congregations.

So what of Acts 9:31? If it is properly translated ‘church’ and not ‘churches’, and if it is thought to mean one church made up of several congregations, then, as I have said, it is unique in Scripture. This should make us pause. Before a universal case is made for church organisation for all time, based on one text, the justification must be very clear indeed. Is one verse sufficient? Yes – but extreme care must be taken. But does Acts 9:31, in the disputed translation, mean that a church is regional and made up of several separate congregations?

No! In Acts 8:1 we read that ‘great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles’. Clearly the ‘they’ in this passage does not mean separate congregations – the apostles were not a congregation! The church was persecuted and all the members were scattered throughout the regions. Did they immediately form other churches in those regions? We are not told that they did. If they did not, then though they were scattered they still regarded themselves as belonging to the church which had been at Jerusalem. After all, the apostles remained in the city, and they continued to exercise the oversight of the scattered believers (Acts 8:14-25). Who could tell but that the persecution might only be temporary, and then they could all return? That is the position in Acts 8 and 9.

The description of the state of affairs as given in Acts 9:31 indicates that an end to the persecution of the scattered church did come, with a time of general prosperity and God’s blessing upon the believers in their scattered condition. But at that stage, they were still the church in Jerusalem – scattered by persecution. This is why they were ‘the church throughout all Judea...’. However, with the passage of time the church had to reorganise itself. It had to come to terms with the new circumstances. The original members from Jerusalem, plus the many new converts (Acts 8:4-6,12), needed to form distinct churches along the usual lines. From that

time on, they would not be the church in Jerusalem, scattered throughout Judea, but they would become the churches of God in Judea, and so on. This is exactly what we read. See Galatians 1:22 and 1 Thessalonians 2:14. Thus the case for separate churches made up of only a single congregation still stands. Acts 9:31 does not support the idea that many congregations formed one church. On either account, whether the word in Acts 9:31 should be translated ‘church’ or ‘churches’, there is no justification for Presbyterians to argue that a regional church should be made up of several distinct congregations. In short, the members of a church are the several, individual believers forming the church; not several congregations.

**(b) *Self-governing churches – or ecclesiastical courts?***

As for the Presbyterian’s second claim – that churches should be organised into groups, and ruled by a series of ecclesiastical courts – they offer but one attempted scriptural proof – namely Acts 15, which they call a record of the Council of Jerusalem. They say that several churches sent delegates to a Council in Jerusalem to debate a doctrinal issue and formulate binding decrees for all the churches which were represented, and this is the standing pattern for all churches for all time.

But this is wrong. Acts 15 does not speak of a synod or Council. What happened is this. Some teachers, who were members of the church in Jerusalem, came to the church in Antioch, where they began to teach Judaistic error. The church at Antioch was troubled and disturbed, to the extent that some believers were even made to stumble by these false teachers (Acts 15:24). After Paul and Barnabas had disputed with the men concerned, the Antioch church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem ‘about this question’ (Acts 15:2). What if these teachers from Jerusalem, or their friends, went to other churches – Lystra, Derbe, Iconium and the rest? What harm might they do? Would there be men of the calibre of Paul and Barnabas in those churches, men who could silence the false teachers? This would be essential (Tit. 1:5-11). And what about Jerusalem itself? Did they realise what their members were teaching, and the damage they were doing? Should they not be told, and thus be able to discipline their members? Consequently, the saints at Antioch decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to put the matter before the Jerusalem church. The Antioch believers ‘determined’ to take this step (Acts 15:2) – it was entirely voluntary on their part, there was no structure or organisation of superior courts in place which made it compulsory. Jerusalem was not the head church. There was no idea of a Council. Paul and Barnabas had already sorted the question out at Antioch. The man of Galatians 1:12 and 2:1-21 did not need to be helped by the counsel of others on the subject! If Paul was prepared to resist Peter, confront him face to face and put the matter right at Galatia, it is foolish to think that he

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needed Peter's guidance over the very same issue at Jerusalem! Paul and Barnabas did not go to Jerusalem to get a ruling on the question itself. It was the practical responsibility of the Jerusalem church which had to be sorted out. And Jerusalem had to do something to stop the trouble reaching other churches in the Gentile world. There were no 'delegates', not even from Antioch, let alone any other church.

When Paul and Barnabas reached Jerusalem, it was the church which they tackled (Acts 15:4); the apostles and elders considered the matter (Acts 15:6). Quite right. Some teachers had gone from the church over which they were responsible, and were causing trouble elsewhere by their false doctrine. Paul and Barnabas were taking the issue back to where it belonged – the church at Jerusalem. It was necessary for the elders at Jerusalem to sort out their local problem, while the apostles had to deal with the world-wide aspects of it. The elders took care of the church members which were under their discipline; the apostles defined the true doctrine. Discussion took place within the church – not at a Council – and a decision was duly arrived at. The false teachers were wrong. A letter was composed by the church in Jerusalem, and sent to all the other churches so that no other church would be molested by these false teachers and their arguments (Acts 15:23). The tone of the letter was rightly apologetic (Acts 15:24). It was then delivered with apostolic authority to the churches (Acts 16:4).

There was no gathering of representatives from various churches at Jerusalem, no Council called to decide a common policy. To say there was is unwarranted. It was simply a case of one church holding brotherly contact with another over an issue which affected them both. Jerusalem needed to put its house in order, and that is what the church at Antioch helped it to do. There was no 'appeal' to the Jerusalem church. Far from being a synod or Council, Acts 15 records the transactions at a church meeting – the church in Jerusalem.

As for the letter which conveyed the decision, it must be remembered that the apostles were still alive and resident in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23). In order that the infection of false teaching which had come out of Jerusalem should go no further, the apostles joined with the elders at Jerusalem to send out this letter to all the churches. But none of this supports the Presbyterian idea of separate congregations forming one church, following which the churches in a region submit to Councils, Synods and General Assemblies. In Acts 15, no disciplinary action by a legislative Council was threatened against 'dependent' churches. There were no dependent churches. No one church was dominant over another. There was no higher-court mentality. Interestingly, in passages such as Romans 14 and 15, and 1 Corinthians 8, there is no appeal to this letter.

Why not, if the Presbyterians are right? To read into Acts 15 the concept of a law-making Council with powers over churches through their delegates, is a travesty of exposition.

Of course, Acts 15 shows that while churches are independent, they are not isolated or insular. On the particular issue of the day, Antioch was right, and Jerusalem needed to reform itself. But the church at Antioch, in brotherly love, took the necessary steps to inform Jerusalem of the problem in order to give it the opportunity to do that very thing. The issue concerned both churches. And both churches concerned themselves over each other's welfare. They also thought of other churches. Therefore, even though Acts 15 gives no support to the idea of Councils, it does teach the need for brotherly cooperation between churches wherever possible and whenever it is needed.

Despite this clear teaching in Acts 15, Bannerman, however, asserted that besides the churches of Antioch and Jerusalem, ‘there were also representatives from the churches of Syria and Cilicia, commissioned to go up to Jerusalem on the same errand’. Where did he find any evidence for that statement? What other churches? What commissioned representatives? A few sentences later Bannerman drew back somewhat. Instead of being certain that these representatives were present he wrote: ‘We have deputies... it would seem, from Syria and Cilicia’. Ah! *It would seem!* Even so – despite the inference and speculation method once again – Bannerman was prepared to argue: ‘Now, in this narrative we have all the elements necessary to make up the idea of a supreme ecclesiastical court, with authority over not only the members and office bearers within the local bounds of the congregations represented, but also the presbyteries or inferior church courts included in the same limits’. With respect, I submit the Presbyterian case is far from being ratified!

In any case, Bannerman proved too much by his speculations. If he was right, and the churches he mentioned were represented at Jerusalem, they did not come merely from a district or locality. They came from different countries. And the letter was sent to all churches, even those which had no ‘representative’ at Jerusalem. In the light of this, are Presbyterians prepared to assert the need, the scriptural warrant, for world-wide Councils with binding authority over all the churches? If so, they are getting very close to the papist system, developed from the Fathers.

Berkhof, once again, was much more restrained, and rightly so. He said: ‘Scripture does not contain an explicit command to the effect that the local churches of a district must form an organic union. Neither does it furnish us with an example of such a union. In fact, it represents the local churches as individual entities without any external bond of union’. Exactly so. Why could the case not rest there? But even Berkhof could not

resist the temptation to go on to speculate. He said that it ‘would seem... it is but natural that this inner unity should express itself in some visible manner, and should even, as much as possible... seek expression in some corresponding external organisation... Every one of these terms points to a visible unity... Certain passages of Scripture which seem to indicate... Moreover, there are reasons for thinking that the church at Jerusalem and at Antioch consisted of several separate groups, which together formed a sort of unity’. Pretty vague stuff this! But, even though there is no scriptural example nor any scriptural command for these courts, Presbyterians think they are the standing order for church life!

On Acts 15, Berkhof frankly and honestly admitted: ‘This... did not constitute a proper example and pattern of a classis or synod in the modern sense of the word’. Why go on with it, in that case? But he did. He then developed the ‘modern sense of the word’ in three paragraphs. He spoke of the representative nature of synods, the way they should be organised, what they deal with, their power and authority, and similar matters. What biblical texts did he supply to support his case? None whatsoever! Not one! Even so – and without a shred of scriptural warrant – Berkhof was prepared to conclude that the highest ecclesiastical courts have authority over all the churches, they carry great weight and must not be set aside except on the most telling of grounds. ‘They are binding on the churches as the sound interpretation and application of the law’, he said. What a staggering claim!

This is not a theoretical debate. The outcome of setting up non-scriptural bodies and organisations to govern the churches is always diabolical. Presbyterians of the 16th and 17th centuries believed that the decisions of ecclesiastical courts were binding on all the churches, their members and their officers. The consequences would be far-reaching as we shall see. There are Presbyterians who continue to believe the same today.

Those who hold to this notion of federations and a system of formal connections between churches argue that separate, independent churches are weak. Nothing could be further from the truth. In time of persecution or apostasy, the enemy – Satan – needs only to attack the central authority, the central theological seminary, or the highest ecclesiastical court of the federated Church, and he has captured the entire set-up. He only needs to poison the central spring, and all the waters will be lethal. At any rate, that is what has happened down the centuries. History is littered with the ruins of apostate federations. In a barrel, one rotten apple will corrupt the lot – by contact! However, if the adversary has to try to grapple with a host of scattered, unknown, unlinked churches, he has a real fight on his hands. He has got to find them all first! Of course, independent churches can be guilty of apostasy, but at least they have the power in their own hands to resist,

they have not delegated it to a higher court. And if other churches should fall, that has no automatic effect on the next. But, whatever else is said about it, the separation of the churches is the scriptural way. And that should be the end of the matter.

In this connection, a highly significant and relevant passage is Revelation 2 and 3, concerning ‘the seven churches’ (Rev. 1:20). By this late stage of the canon of Scripture, the New Testament system of church order was well established. What do we find? While it is always dangerous to argue from silence – though Presbyterians are fond of it<sup>2</sup> – certain points stand out. The seven churches were located close together in one region, yet they are called seven churches, not seven congregations forming one church. Furthermore, there is no hint whatsoever of any organisation linking them together. There is not a vestige of support for the idea of one common government over the seven, separate churches. There is no association spoken of. There is no suggestion of it. On the contrary, each church is commended for any good within it, each church is responsible for its own faults, accountable for its own failures, and responsible to reform itself under Christ – all *without any outside interference whatsoever*. What is more, each church is autonomous. It has the full powers necessary to reform itself.

Reader, you will see that the attempted scriptural defence of the Presbyterian system in these matters is largely drawn from the early chapters of Acts. These chapters, as noted earlier, deal with extraordinary apostolic circumstances which had an overwhelming effect on church organisation and government in those days. But the ordinary New Testament church order is made very clear in the later books. There the proper administration of the Lord’s supper, the recognition of elders and deacons, and all other church matters, are dealt with in plain instructions. Why is it not possible for the Presbyterians to establish their system from the letters to Timothy and Titus? Why are there no plain passages dealing with synods, church courts, congregations and all the rest of it? We are not left to establish the principles of eldership by inference, are we? Therefore why should we have to do it in the case of synods? The truth is – while there is a large amount of New Testament material dealing with the rule, order and practice of local, separate, independent churches – there is nothing whatsoever dealing with the government of several congregations that are combined into one church. What is more, though Bannerman might speak of the ‘simplicity’ of the Presbyterian system, it is evident that it is extremely complicated, and largely speculative. Oh, for the simplicity of the New Testament.

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<sup>2</sup> See my *Infant Baptism Tested*.

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Is there any significance in the unforced admission by Berkhof: ‘It seems rather peculiar that practically all the outstanding Presbyterian dogmaticians of our country, such as the two Hodges, H.B. Smith, Shedd, and Dabney, have no separate locus on the church in their dogmatical works and, in fact, devote very little attention to it’? Presbyterians ought to think about that!<sup>3</sup>

To sum up: The introduction of Presbyterianism, while it was a huge improvement upon the papal system, did not get as close to the New Testament as mainstream Anabaptism did. Nevertheless, it was a very important step towards the final goal. It played its part, as we shall see.

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Under Calvin, Geneva became the centre of the Reformation, partly because the city was situated in a most important position from a geographical point of view. But, even more important, Calvin’s exceptional abilities, coupled with the generous welcome the city gave to the many Christian exiles and refugees from all over Europe at that time, meant that Calvin wielded a huge and widespread influence throughout the Continent. He preached incessantly in the city, even daily at times; he engaged in correspondence on a massive scale; he published commentaries on every New Testament book except the Revelation, and on twenty-three of the Old. He wrote on many scriptural subjects, but his most important book was that slim volume he had first published in 1536, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Having revised it several times and enlarged it, it rapidly became the handbook of systematic theology for nearly all the Reformed churches, and is still treasured today. As the late David Wright said, it ‘became Calvin’s best-known publication, and probably the most influential theological work to come out of the Reformation’. Even so, it has its faults – some extremely serious, as I have explained, especially in my *Infant Baptism Tested*. It may seem an obvious fact to state, but it needs stating: The *Institutes* are not the Bible, and Calvin was not always consistent, let alone always right. Sadly, too many make a virtual pope of Calvin.

Having said that, it is hard to over-state how greatly God used John Calvin. This man did so very much for the church of God, despite a life of suffering, bouts of illness, years of loneliness and sadness. He thought little about his own wants, nor did he spare himself in the cause of Christ, but continued working until almost the day of his death, which occurred during his mid-fifties.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on church government, see my forthcoming: *The Pastor: Does He Exist?*.

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And, though he had his faults and he made his mistakes, some of which I have referred to, history has frequently treated him most unfairly. He has been much maligned and grossly misrepresented. He was not a legalist;<sup>4</sup> he did not believe in salvation by works; he did not preach a joyless, heartless Christianity. He was a man over whom God had triumphed by his grace. He in return spent himself in the service of the Lord.

He is best known, needless to say, for his system of the exposition of the doctrines of the gospel, commonly known as ‘Calvinism’. While this has sometimes been developed – perhaps degenerated might be a better word – into a philosophical and political system, its strength and glory lie in its clarity of expression of the gospel. This he traced from the free sovereign grace and will of God, worked out in the glorious redemption accomplished by Christ, and applied to the elect by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Some misinformed critics think that Calvin was only interested in the doctrine of predestination, but he was concerned for much more than that! He was a most accomplished theologian, and ranged over the entire revelation of God. For example, as I noted earlier, Calvin was fervent about the doctrine and practice of the church, and he deplored divisions among the Reformed Churches. He showed great willingness to cooperate with other men – far more than is commonly appreciated, let alone acknowledged – even when he disagreed with their point of view. He was far more tolerant than most men of his time, saying: ‘I am ready to cross ten seas for the union of the church’. But having said all that, it is essential to look more fully at the way he tried to put into practice his views of Church and State.

### ***Calvin’s attempt to put Constantinian theories into effect at Geneva***

Unfortunately, the continued love and application of Constantine principles marred the work at Geneva. I have made this claim several times. It is high time I justified it. And it is important to justify it because, as I have also repeatedly asserted, the danger is not yet over. Some Christians are hankering after the restoration of Constantine, perhaps through ignorance, and without realising it. At least, they are adopting methods which tend that way, thinking that it will usher in some golden age. The experience at Geneva must serve as a salutary warning to all who take that position.

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<sup>4</sup> His exposition of the so-called threefold use of the Mosaic law, however, has been the source of much controversy – and harm! See my forthcoming book on the law, where I will thoroughly work this out.

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It is claimed that the most recent research may well paint a different picture of Geneva during the years 1542-1564; different to that which is commonly held by scholars at present. In the light of this coming research, it is alleged that ‘almost all previous work on the Geneva Consistory is distorted’. I am not competent to comment, but I record this claim in an attempt to be fair. Time will tell if the assertion proves to be well-founded. As it is, I have tried to be honest with the evidence we have at the moment, and I have drawn my conclusions from what are considered to be reputable sources.

Some friendly historians have tried to keep Calvin free of blame for the blemishes at Geneva, but it is quite clear that Calvin was responsible for the union of Church and State in the city. Therefore he cannot be exempted from responsibility for the evil consequences which followed directly from his policies. For example, in 1536 it was Calvin who submitted a Confession of Faith along with several theses to the council. And as Emanuel Stickelberger wrote:

According to these theses the Little Council had the right to punish any trespass against the law of God; the ministers were to assist the Council therein. The people, through its representation, divests itself of all rights in the matters of faith and places them into the hands of the government and of the clergy. Thereby the foundation stone for the theocratic State was laid, a State which Calvin strove to attain... It was a theocratic State whose constitution was based on the Reformed faith and which felt itself responsible before God for the behaviour of its citizens.

Yes, Calvin was responsible for the theocratic State in Geneva, he did strive to attain it, he did use the civil magistrates to enforce its laws. And once Calvin and Farel had the law behind them, they set about bringing the city into line. ‘All the sores on the body of the theocratic State must be removed so that it may be sanctified... The Little Council... punished without respect of persons what morality reprimanded’. All manner of sins and offences met with public humiliation, or prison with only bread and water. Preaching and church discipline coupled with civil law and punishment, hand in hand with the council’s enforcement of the Reformed religion, were the means used to forge Geneva into a ‘Christian State’. To get a ‘Christian State’ was Calvin’s aim. Nevertheless it was a vain hope. But he was responsible for the attempt and, in principle, for the consequences.

Furthermore, it was not only vain. It was an entirely non-New Testament way of going on. There is never an instance of a church in the New Testament using the machinery of the State to bring about the reformation of society and its conformity to the gospel. It is impossible, in any case. It was never attempted by the early church. It was not only

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misguided in Geneva – it was wrong. And however much some present-day Christians might desire such a state of affairs, it was evil. Things got out of hand in Geneva in the 16th century. They got out of hand in England in the 1640s, and in New England in the 1690s... And if we try to use such methods, they will get out of hand for us, too. Those who take the sword will perish with it (Matt. 26:52).

As H. Henry Meeter, one-time Professor of Bible and Calvinism at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, rightly declared:

Calvin and all the principal religious groups from the time of Constantine, or rather even from the time of the ancient Romans down, were indeed wrong when they made the government the defender of the true religion. God never entrusted the propagation and defence of the true religion to the government. He entrusted this task to the church. And the weapons by which it was to be propagated and defended was not by the sword of the State and of force, but by the sword of the Spirit, the Bible, which changes hearts and minds.

Wise words indeed. That is the teaching of the New Testament. This point will come up again and again throughout this book; it has already appeared with Luther and Zwingli, and their onslaught against the Anabaptists. If only Calvin, and all the others who so vainly clung to the doctrine of Constantine, could have let the wicked system sink into oblivion where it belongs, how very different the history we are considering would have been. Thousands of lives would have been spared countless misery.

William Cunningham, though an earnest and able defender of Calvin, justly said:

We admit that [the Reformers] held erroneous views upon the subject of toleration, and ascribed to the civil magistrate a power of punishing upon religious grounds... Civil rulers, in seeking to discharge their duty in regard to religion, must not assume any jurisdiction or authoritative control over the regulation of the affairs of the church of Christ... they must not inflict upon men civil pains and penalties – fines, imprisonments, or death – merely on account of differences of opinion upon religious subjects... These essential limitations of the right of interference on the part of civil rulers in religious matters seem to us very plain; but they have not been always seen and appreciated by those who have contended for the scriptural duty of nations and their rulers.

Calvin was certainly guilty on these counts. He wrote a letter to the Protector in England when Edward was king, concerning the handling of heretics, in which he distinguished two sorts of ‘troublesome people’. One sort were the Papists; the other were, probably, the Anabaptists. Calvin advised: ‘These both deserve to be punished with that avenging sword which the Lord has delivered to you’. But the law in England for the burning of heretics needed no support from Calvin. It had been introduced

by the bishops during the reign of Henry IV, in the notorious Act of 1401, for the suppression of the followers of Wycliffe, and it was not removed from the Statute Book until 1679. Calvin was not alone, however. Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor at Geneva, was even more harsh. He wrote vigorously in defence of intolerance and persecution, seeking to justify it even in the execution of Servetus, of whom more in a few moments. On this very issue, Farel, too, would have gone further than Calvin, writing to him to complain that he had been too lenient with the heretic.

Cunningham, in his criticisms of this sort of intolerance, went on to speak of the Reformers who, by and large, 'admitted the general principle of the right of civil rulers to inflict pains and penalties on account of heresy and blasphemy... This was a notion which... had no solid foundation to rest upon, and was both erroneous and dangerous', he justly wrote. So why did the Reformers – Luther, Calvin and all the rest of them – do it? Because of the 'misapplication of some considerations derived from the judicial law of Moses', rightly said Cunningham. I have already noted this misapplication of the Old Testament. And how often the mistake was repeated over and over again during the 16th and 17th centuries. It has not died to this day.

In an attempt to excuse Calvin, it is often said that he was a man of his age, 'a child of his century', that sadly 'he did not rise above the prevailing sentiments of his age in regard to the civil magistrate's right to punish heresy'. True enough. And I have already said that Calvin was far more tolerant than the majority of the men of his time. But he was not tolerant enough. What is more, some men of his time – and before and after – did rise above their age and century. The Anabaptists in the 1520s did. Men like John Smyth, Thomas Helwys and Leonard Busher – of whom I shall speak in coming chapters – did so in the early 1600s. Let the men and women of this stamp be honoured. In these matters, they were not children of their century and age; they were children of the New Testament. Trying to excuse Calvin on the grounds that every town in the Middle Ages had its laws to regulate the morals of its citizens, just will not wash. Nor is it good enough to plead that Calvin tried to bring this governance under the rule of the Church. For although this move might be reckoned an improvement by many, the notion was still based upon Constantine. It was therefore unscriptural and wrong.

Nor was the mistake which Calvin and others made, in regard to their linking of Church and State, confined to their own times. They sowed the seeds of a controversy which would have long-term consequences, and persists to this day. Berkhof went as far as to say that 'Calvin and the Reformed theologians of the 17th century in a measure fostered the idea of the subjection of the church to the State'. That misguided notion was a

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seed which, once sown, germinated, grew and blossomed with devastating effect. As I have made clear, Luther did the same thing. Multitudes paid dearly for the mistaken idea.

The truth is, ‘Calvin wanted a pure people, sound in body and soul’ but ‘preaching was not sufficient for this purpose’. Thus wrote Stickelberger in words of enormous significance. Calvin apparently did not find the New Testament weapon of preaching sufficient. This was because he was trying to make the church do what it ought not! Stickelberger later added: ‘In reality it was the Reformation in Geneva which completely supplanted the secular power by the spiritual [or rather, the other way about?]. From then on only did the State become concerned about things which heretofore pertained to the church only. The State went so far as to establish the number of worship services and to specify the meeting hours. A preacher was not allowed to publish anything without the approval of the Council, nor might he leave the city even for a few days’.

The ministers in Geneva were for ever calling for more stringent rules to regulate all sorts of moral and economic activity in the private lives of the *citizens*. This is the nub of the question. The church ought to rule its *members*. But, in the Constantine system, citizens and church members are one and the same. This is the mistake. Hence ‘edict followed edict from the Council’. What matters were covered by these laws? Cards, dice, songs, dancing, taverns, church attendance, fashions of dress and shoes, hair styles, naming of children, criticism of Calvin’s preaching, censorship, blasphemy, drunkenness, sexual sins... Of course some of these matters are very serious. Yes, the Bible has strong words to say on some of them. But only some of them, mark you! But, in any case, is the enforcement of law the right way to change men’s hearts? And take those strong biblical words – to whom are they addressed? To citizens of states, or to church members? See 1 Corinthians 5, especially verses 12-13.

Statistical estimates vary, but it has been said ‘that in Geneva, a town of 16,000 inhabitants, 58 persons were executed and 76 banished in the years 1542-6’. Such figures make grim reading. Trying to be fair, I remind you of the recent claim that current research may well paint a very different picture of those years. Also, it has to be remembered, all men read the past through their own political and religious spectacles. What is more, those modern historians who have attacked Calvin for reasons of their own, in turn have had their critics!

However, the height of regulation was reached in 1576, just over a decade after Calvin’s death, when the Genevan Church-State ‘established a certain rule and order of living, by which each man may be able to understand the duties of his position’. This was done in order that the doctrine of the gospel might be preserved pure, the church be well-ordered,

the young be properly instructed, and the poor be sympathetically cared for. But, as has been remarked: ‘It is sad to reflect that the attainment of so laudable an end involved the systematic use of torture, the beheading of a child for striking its parents, and the burning of a hundred and fifty heretics in sixty years’.

Calvin was a great man. But the Constantine system was a great evil. It still is. And what is so tragic is that many Christians want to cling on to Constantine in our day, and there seems to be a resurgence of, or a toying with, political Calvinism. Those who are dabbling with it need to contemplate its end result. Besides which, such men forget that the law – not even the law of God – can produce righteousness (Rom. 8:3 and Heb. 7:18-19). In the gospel age, we are no longer under the Old Testament economy, for ‘the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17). Saints are not produced by the dominion of the law but under grace (Rom. 6:14; 7:1-6; 8:1-4). The law is now written upon the hearts of God’s people (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10; 10:16).<sup>5</sup> Godliness is not a matter of outward conformity backed by punishment, but comes from an inward longing to please God. Until a man is regenerated and given a new heart, he will never desire to obey God. To try to make pagans into Christian look-alikes by enforcement of a penal system is downright folly. It is highly dangerous. To try to advance the kingdom of Christ by rule and regulation – and punishment – is both wrong and useless.<sup>6</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most notorious consequence of Calvin’s continuance of the Constantine system was that it led to the violent death of the heretic, Michael Servetus, who was burned by order of the authorities at Geneva on the 27th of October, 1553. Calvin’s mistaken views on civil authority and on the proper form of discipline in the church led directly to this wicked act. I admit that Servetus was a Spanish heretic who denied the Trinity, but the death penalty is not the way to deal with heretics. Of course, it is true to say that in Calvin’s day thousands of men and women were put to the stake, or otherwise executed in the name of Christ. Life was cheap. Nearly every other section of the professing church had far more blood upon its hands – ‘torturing and burning’ in the name of Christ was virtually universal – the only exception being the Anabaptists and their like. But, as

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<sup>5</sup> And this ‘law’, in the new covenant, ‘the law of Christ’ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), is more than the ten commands. See, for example, John 17:17.

<sup>6</sup> I am not thinking only of the political realm. Too much Reformed preaching amounts to sanctification (often, mere outward conformity) by law, rule or commandment. ‘Christ is all’ (Col. 3:11). As I have said, see my forthcoming book on the law for more on these vital matters.

I have spelled out, Calvin and political Calvinism were, sadly, mixed up with the whole shameful thinking of Constantine, and put into practice at Geneva. As we have seen, Calvin took the many Old Testament examples of kings, judges and prophets, and mistakenly applied these to the church, with the result that ‘ministers played the part of Old Testament prophets to an Israel not wholly weaned from the fleshpots of Egypt’. Though, as I noted earlier, Calvin was a child of his day, this does not excuse the wrongness of the system – Calvin’s system – which lead inexorably to the death of Servetus.

In the fall-out of this sorry affair, no doubt many of Calvin’s contemporary critics and their criticisms can be discounted as prejudiced and rising out of a jealous or bitter spirit. It is true that he did appeal for a measure of mercy in the case of the Spaniard, pleading that the death sentence be carried out by the sword and not the fire. As I have observed, Farel actually objected to Calvin’s ‘leniency’. The fact is, Calvin was responsible for the death of Servetus, but not for his death *by burning*. After all, Rome advocated the stake and the fire, so Calvin wished to steer clear of *that*, if he could. Nevertheless, his words fell on deaf ears. Somewhat akin to Luther, Calvin had forged a monstrous machine which seemed to have a will of its own.

Notwithstanding, it has to be repeated – it cannot be gainsaid – that the barbaric punishments at Geneva arose out of Calvin’s own system and he – like Luther before him – has to bear the responsibility. Of course, Calvin’s defenders can quote many passages in his works which speak of tolerance and gentleness. As I have pointed out, he, once more like Luther, was inconsistent, as all sinners are, including the author (and the reader) of this book! But it is the case that people could not speak their minds freely in the so-called ‘Christian State’ of Geneva. Even his friends have called Calvin ‘the head of the church’ of Geneva. Stickelberger admitted that ‘this is true in the sense that he guided the Church of the city’. Another said that Geneva was ‘saturated with the piety of Calvin’. The Ordinances ‘corresponded to his original intentions’. It is a fact that Calvin was the President of the Consistory, the ruling body of Geneva, and was made so for life. He was the virtual dictator of the city. There is no doubt that Geneva was what Calvin made it. Both good and bad.

And there was an immense amount of good. On that side of the question, the eye-witness testimony of men like John Knox must not be forgotten. He said: ‘In other places, I confess Christ to be truly preached, but manners and religion so sincerely reformed I have not yet seen in any place besides’. This statement was also recorded by Preserved Smith who, in addition, repeated Knox’s famous opinion that Geneva was ‘the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the days of the

## *Geneva*

apostles'. Oh yes, for all his mistakes, John Calvin made a massive contribution to the cause of Christ in his own generation, and it has lasted even until this day. It can truly be said that he fully lived up to Farel's expectations and, master-builder as he was, he laid a solid foundation for the Reformed faith, not only in Geneva but throughout the world. Until Christ comes the name and work of John Calvin will be respected and honoured throughout the church of God. It goes without saying that he was pre-eminently a man of Scripture,<sup>7</sup> and in all his works he had but one aim – the glory of God.

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On the 6th of February, 1564, Calvin preached what proved to be his last sermon – he suffered an attack of bleeding in his lungs while engaged in the pulpit. Realising that death could not be many weeks away, he addressed a company of ministers in his room in these words:

Gird yourselves up and take courage, for God has a use for this church, and will maintain it. I tell you God will keep it in safety... I beg you... to introduce no novelties. People are always seeking novelty...

Even to the last, Calvin was thinking of the prosperity of the church and doing all he could to secure it.

The end was not long delayed. He died peacefully on the 27th of May, 1564, repeating but unable to complete the words: 'The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be...' (Rom. 8:18). The people grieved over his death and wept at the loss of their faithful pastor. He was carried to his final earthly resting-place in a simple wooden coffin, and buried without pomp or grandeur in a grave unmarked by a headstone. On hearing of his death, the pope could not help paying this tribute to his arch-enemy:

The strength of that heretic consisted in this, that money never had the slightest charm for him. If I had such servants, my dominions would extend from sea to sea.

So lived and died John Calvin – one of the mightiest warriors who ever took up arms in Christ's cause, and fought on the Lord's side in the battle for the church. This poor man's life and labours were, indeed, a sword 'sharpened and also polished' by God.

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<sup>7</sup> But, sadly, he was also much taken – much too much taken – with the Fathers, particularly Augustine, as I have shown in my *Infant Baptism Tested* and my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

## *The First Nonconformist*

This charge I commit to you... that... you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience... These things I write... that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth

1 Timothy 1:18-19; 3:14-15

*London, 1539 – the Whip with Six Strings – Hooper leaves England – meets the Reformers – his views made more clear – Henry’s death – Edward – Hooper returns to England – demands reform – refuses a bishopric – his continued stand against the king, Cranmer and Ridley – the arguments – the conflict between Scripture and Constantine – Bucer’s proposals – Ridley’s attack – Hooper arrested – he yields – his mistake – his standing warning*

John Hooper, one-time Bishop of Gloucester, was burned at the stake in that city in 1555, during the reign of Mary. Only a few years before, in the time of King Edward, Hooper had made a resolute stand for truth, a stand which had a great impact on the course of the reformation of the church of God in England, even though at the time it appeared that his firmness had failed to accomplish anything.

Hooper dug his heels in over the issue of the nature and exercise of authority in the church. Because of his attitude and stand, he has rightly been called the ‘Father of Puritanism’ or the ‘Founder of Nonconformity’. Like William Tyndale before him, he was willing to defy the establishment – the king, Church dignitaries and Parliament – in order to obey God. Hooper was not at all satisfied that the Church of England was sufficiently reformed, and he wanted it to move to a position closer to the New Testament, even though this provoked the undisguised anger of the authorities. In effect, it made him a Puritan before their time, in that he demanded that the church be ‘purified’ of various superstitions. Hence the ‘Father of Puritanism’. He refused to conform (at least for a while); hence the ‘Founder of Nonconformity’. Of course, the Anabaptists had long refused to conform to the State Church, but by his stand for a purified church, Hooper made his own most valuable contribution to the cause of Christ. He fought valiantly in the battle for the recovery of the New Testament pattern. Also, apart from the Anabaptists and their like, he was the first man after the Reformation in England to declare publicly that the State should not interfere with religion.

John Hooper was born in Somerset in 1495. A Papist from birth, he probably became a monk after graduating at Oxford in 1518, rising to become a courtier of King Henry VIII. He came to saving faith in Christ in part, at least, through reading the works of Zwingli, and the commentary on Paul's letters by Johann Bullinger, Zwingli's successor at Zurich. Around the year 1539, Hooper's outspoken views brought Henry's wrath down upon him, and he had to flee to the Continent to escape persecution. The Church of England at that time had been partly reformed, but not enough for Hooper.

It will be recalled that Henry in the early 1520s had burned Luther's works, and written against him. But by the end of the decade the king had himself turned against Rome, removed Wolsey from power, and appointed Thomas Cranmer as Archbishop of Canterbury. Parliament, which assembled in November, 1534, passed the Act of Supremacy, in which Henry was acknowledged to be the 'sole and supreme head on earth of the Church of England'. The Act went on to grant Henry not only all the 'honours, jurisdictions, and profits attached to that dignity, but also full authority to put down all heresies'. What is more, whoever spoke or did anything contrary to this Act, whether concerning Henry or any of his heirs, was accounted 'guilty of high treason'. Thus Henry threw off the Papacy to become a virtual Pope in England. Remaining a Papist at heart, however, he introduced severe laws to enforce Romanism with rigour, and was prepared to put to death any who contradicted him. The infamous Act of Six Articles of 1539 imposed the death penalty by burning for those who denied popish dogmas such as the real presence of Christ in the Mass. This Act has been aptly named the *Whip with Six Strings*. It was a whip which Henry was prepared to use with vigour. It was about this time that Hooper left England.

All the same, God was working out his purpose in and through this trouble for Hooper, in that, while in exile on the Continent, he met Bullinger and other Reformers, and through these contacts he became more and more Reformed in his thinking. Especially, he came to appreciate the New Testament teaching on the church. In this way, he began to see even more clearly that the Church of England needed to be thoroughly purged and purified according to Scripture. He stated his view in these words:

The Scriptures are the law of God; none may set aside their commands or add to their injunctions. Christ's kingdom is a spiritual one... neither the pope nor king may govern the church... Christ alone is the Governor of his church... The Scripture and the apostles' churches are solely to be followed, and no man's authority... There is nothing to be done in the church but is commanded... by the word of God...

On the death of Henry in 1547, Edward VI became king, and the friends of the Reformation cherished great hopes for the prosperity of the Church of England. Since a better day had dawned, Hooper knew it was his duty to return from exile, and do all he could to further the cause of Christ in his own land. There was a favourable wind blowing over England, and now was the time to hoist the sails of the gospel. Accordingly, he arrived home shortly after Edward came to the throne, in order to help in the task of the further reformation of the church.

Under the new king, some improvements were set in hand at once. An Act of Uniformity was passed in 1549, enforcing a complete system of worship for the Church of England, as contained in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Nevertheless, Hooper did not agree with certain aspects of this Prayer Book, and in his sermons, which were very popular and noted for biblical exposition, he drew attention to the imperfect state of the reformation of the church, and he called for more changes to get it closer to the New Testament. Preaching before King Edward, he asserted that the Prayer Book contained instructions with regard to vestments which were frankly contrary to Scripture. He bluntly stated that those responsible for it had no proper authority for these practices, saying they ‘have not in the word of God that thus a minister should be apparelled nor yet in the primitive and best church’. Having thus declared what the pattern for the church is and where it may be found, he went on to demand that:

The primitive church be restored, which never yet had nor shall have any match or like. Let all movements and tokens of idolatry and superstition be removed, and the true religion of God be set in their place.

He predicted that if wicked practices were tolerated in the church, and excused by calling them ‘things indifferent’, they would eventually become ‘things essential’. Hooper was deeply distressed over the corrupt condition of the church, and earnestly longed for the New Testament pattern to be restored.

In 1550, he was nominated to become Bishop of Gloucester, but although he desired the position to enable him to put into practical effect his ideas to further the reformation of the church, and to suppress vice and Popery, he had no time to waste on footling ceremonies and foolish superstitions! They were more than stupid – they were sinful – but if he became a bishop he would have to go through with the nonsense. All he wanted to do was to get on with real work for God! Certainly the diocese of Gloucester had need of him. In a survey which Hooper carried out, he found that it had 311 clergy; 168 of whom did not know the ten commandments, and 31 of these could not find them in the Bible; 40 did not know where to find the Lord’s prayer (so-called), 31 of whom did not know who had instructed the disciples to pray in this way!

Even so, much as Hooper wanted to advance the cause of God, he was not willing to do evil in the hope that good might come, however great that good might be. He was convinced that the wearing of vestments was contrary to Scripture, and he knew that if he consented to be consecrated Bishop of Gloucester, he would have to compromise himself, wear the obnoxious garb, and thus offend his conscience. For this reason, he resisted stoutly. Hooper was prepared to quarrel over the issue, even with his distinguished friends, Archbishop Cranmer and Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of London.

Hooper had further complaints to make, raising several other objections to the Prayer Book service. He protested against the taking of an oath which involved the invocation of the Saints; he objected to the performance of various superstitious ceremonies – like the parading of the Bible on his shoulders, for example; and he rejected sundry nonsensical regulations about the exact way to carry the Bible or hold the elements in the Lord's supper. All this sort of palaver was highly offensive to him, because it was either contrary to Scripture or additional to it. Either way, he would have no part in such a service.

But Hooper's main objection was over the ministerial vestments in use in the Church of England. Among the arguments which he used against the garments, he asserted that the vestments were leftovers from the Levitical priesthood of Aaron, and based upon it. Since that priesthood had been abolished by Christ, the priestly vestments likewise have been abolished in the gospel. Hence, it is a sin to use them. He quoted Galatians 3 and Hebrews chapters 7-10 and reasoned:

The doctrine of Paul is this – that whosoever recalls things abrogated in Christ, transgresses the will of God... The priesthood of Aaron has been abolished in the priesthood of Christ, with all its rites, vestments, unctions, consecrations and the like... The shadows of the aaronic priesthood cannot consist with the priesthood of Christ...

He went on to argue that the Church of England vestments were papistical garments, and therefore belonged to the Antichrist, not to the church. He declared that Rome was quite open about the origin of the 'popish priesthood which even by the testimony of their own books has been derived from Aaron, or from the Gentiles'. Rome clearly and unashamedly admitted that its vestments were either aaronic or pagan! Hooper argued, therefore, that since the Church of England had inherited her ministerial apparel from Rome, then she must have a popish priesthood, too. Consequently the Church of England had an aaronical or even pagan priesthood – unless the vestments were done away with. No church which wished to be New Testament in doctrine and practice could possibly tolerate the popish priesthood, or anything belonging to it. Hence, unless

the vestments were abolished, he would not consent to be made Bishop of Gloucester. It was a vital matter of principle with him.

In the summer of 1550, King Edward grew deeply concerned over the delay. He very much wanted Hooper as a bishop, so he struck out the offending words in the oath with his own hand. All the same, the question of vestments remained.

Nicholas Ridley had been a firm friend of John Hooper over the years, and the pair of them had worked together to reform the State Church. For instance, Ridley had valued and made use of Hooper's preaching gift on important occasions. But now the two men were in direct conflict over the vestments; Ridley did not agree with Hooper, to put it mildly. Thomas Cranmer, too, strongly opposed Hooper, and warned him of legal action against him if he persisted in his objections to the garments.

Actually, Cranmer and Ridley were guilty of hypocrisy at this time. In the summer of 1550, they had consecrated one, Thomas Sampson, as a priest, without his wearing vestments. And Sampson had protested on exactly the same grounds as Hooper! But Hooper was a well-known figure who was to be consecrated the Bishop of Gloucester, not merely an obscure priest. That made all the difference!

Notwithstanding the threat of legal action hanging over him, Hooper was adamant; he would not consent. Therefore the authorities tried another approach. They told Cranmer he could break the rules with impunity, that he would be granted a royal pardon if he went ahead and consecrated Hooper without vestments. Despite this legal device handed down from on high, it was Ridley's turn to dig his heels in. He would not hear of it. It was out of the question. Hooper was defying the law! He must not be allowed to get away with it! The law of the king, the Church and Parliament must be obeyed – even by Hooper. Especially by Hooper.

Ridley went further. Fighting back against his former friend, he took up the challenge of Hooper's arguments, and attempted a response. He did not agree that the wearing of vestments was sinful; it was a 'thing indifferent' he said. It was not a question of Scripture at all, it was a question of the laws of England. Hooper was disobeying the regulations of King Edward. Addressing the Council, Ridley demanded:

I pray you, who has appointed now and instituted our vestments in the Church of England? And who has established them? Has not the Archbishop with his company of learned men thereunto appointed by the king his Highness and his Majesty's Council appointed them? Has not the king his Majesty and the whole Parliament established them?

This statement of Ridley's was of the utmost significance, standing in sharp contrast to the words of Hooper. It showed very clearly that the issue in question was not merely a few garments – it was authority. That was the

crux of it. Authority! To Hooper, the governance in the church – as in all things – was God’s mind declared in Scripture. To Ridley, at least on this issue, it was the king, the Church, and ‘the whole Parliament’, which constituted the authority. Instead of Scripture, it was the ‘company of learned men’ for him. Their regulations were the rule.

It was nothing but Constantine all over again, and Hooper’s stance forced it out into the open. Typical of the consequences of the mistaken but commonly held union of Church and State, the king and his Council were constantly framing and reframing laws, enforcing ministers to wear ‘red habits by some on some days, and white and black habits by others on other days, changing the laws themselves within two years, and burning, hanging, or imprisoning all those who could not change their consciences as fast as the rulers could theirs’. It was a farce – apart from the horrible price it exacted in blood. And what was happening in the country while all this was going on? What good did all the regulation-making do? What contribution did it make to the advance of the gospel? None, for ‘immorality flourished like a green bay-tree’. Nevertheless, the regulations continued to multiply. And so did the sin.

Martin Bucer described the condition of the country, saying that ‘lying, cheating, theft, perjury, and whoredom are the complaints of the times’. Bucer, the Reformer from Strasbourg, was now Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, and his words carried great weight with Edward and his advisers. He had taught Calvin in the formative days at Strasbourg, and his liturgy shaped that which was introduced to Geneva, and thence in Scotland. What did Bucer propose to deal with the wickedness of the people? Foolishly, like other Reformers, he turned back to Constantine to produce a manual of Christian politics to show the Christian king how he might thereby establish the kingdom of Christ in England. Sparing no pains, his system’s ‘outlines were sharpened, and its details elaborated, with all the remorseless precision’ of a devotee of Constantine.

And this was the atmosphere in which Hooper was making his stand on vestments. It was the way the overwhelming majority felt in those days. The question boiled down to one of authority: Is the king to be obeyed simply because he is a king? Does he have the power and the right to regulate the church? Ridley thought so – in everything. Hooper staunchly disagreed. In matters of religion, he would obey God rather than men.

Ridley went on to warn the Council that Hooper was playing with fire – literally – by his obstinacy, because if he continued in this vein he would end up an Anabaptist. And nothing could be worse than that! Since 1549, Edward had made use of a Commission to root out Anabaptists and others who spurned the Prayer Book. If such heretics could not be reclaimed, their ultimate end was death by the civil authorities, having been handed over to

their power by the Church. Ridley even had some cautionary words for the king himself, advising him to watch his step in his dealings with the prospective Bishop of Gloucester. He said: ‘Let his Highness take good heed with his doings’. It looks as though Ridley was afraid that the king would be too lenient with the rebel. Throughout, Ridley was very much committed to his authoritarian view. Some historians think he altered his opinion at the last, but it is probably not so. It is true that he wrote sympathetically to Hooper when he, Ridley, was awaiting his own execution. And it is also true that he resisted the attempt by the Papists to degrade him wearing his vestments when he reached his own end. But it is likely that neither of these facts means that he really changed his mind on the wearing of vestments in accordance with the laws of Parliament and Church. The ideas of Constantine were too deeply ingrained in him.

Ridley now tried another tack. If Hooper would drop his assertion that vestments were sinful, then he, Ridley, would consecrate him wearing anything he liked – even that old coat Hooper always wore! But Hooper still would not budge. Vestments *were* sinful! They were forbidden by Scripture. And that was that. He would not be moved.

Cranmer consulted some of the continental Reformers over the matter, all of whom, with one exception, sided with him against Hooper. In any event, even if Hooper knew of this, it did not affect him, and still he refused to change his mind. He did not give in just because the majority were against him. The quarrel grew bitter, and was prolonged. The authorities offered this ‘difficult’ man a tempting compromise: if only he would agree to be consecrated in the vestments, he need never wear them any more – except for some special occasions! Hooper once again refused. Going further, he preached about it, much to the embarrassment of the authorities, who wanted this annoying quarrel hushed up. Hooper defied their orders; he would not keep silent; he would preach! And on the 20th of December, 1550, he actually went into print, and published his Confession of Faith.

For this ‘insolence’, he was placed under house-arrest at Lambeth Palace, and was warned of grave consequences if he went on with his refusals. Hooper still would not yield, even though some of the continental Reformers, who were in England at the time, came to see him and talked it over with him. Finally the powers-that-be ran out of patience. On the 27th of January, 1551, the Privy Council committed him to the Fleet prison for his obstinacy.

Here is yet another challenge to us. Hooper put adherence to Scripture above loyalty to his friends. He would not be moved. No! neither by threat nor by flattery. How is it with you, reader? Do you want to be thought popular? Do you yield on your loyalty to Scripture because of taunts,

sneers or mockery from those about you? Surely you find that this account of Hooper's stance on what was called 'a small matter' is a challenge to you? How often gospel principles are compromised by professing Christians today.

In the light of Hooper's previous resolution, it is very sad to have to record that, despite all the months of steadfast determination and refusal to be moved either by inducement or by threat, after a month in the Fleet, Hooper gave way. In all fairness, it must be said that it was not through lack of courage that Hooper gave in. Courage Hooper always had, and he would display it in even larger measure within a few years, when he would be burned at the stake. No! Cowardice was not the reason. The reason he yielded was that he persuaded himself that he ought to do what he could for the further reformation of the church. It was his duty. From his debates with Cranmer and Ridley over vestments, he knew they would not go far enough or fast enough in putting matters right. Either they could not see the issues, or they would not face up to them. Therefore, he must get out of prison and do what he could. For this reason, he consented to wear the miserable vestments and be consecrated as Cranmer and Ridley wanted – in order to get out of prison and get on with the real task. He was duly consecrated on the 8th of March, 1551.

Even so, it is proper to wonder if this was the right decision. Did he not go back on his first resolve, even though he continued to maintain that his thoughts about Cranmer and Ridley, and their lack of discernment, were justified? And was not his first resolve the right one? Was it not a case of doing a little evil that much good may be done, after all? In addition, it is undeniable that if only Hooper had maintained his stance just a little longer, he would have seen his arguments largely put into effect. He had accomplished more than he realised by his obstinacy. Just over a year after Hooper's release from the Fleet, the Second Prayer Book of King Edward was published, and this abolished the ritual of the ordination service to which he had taken such exception. More than that, most of the offensive vestments were done away with – not all, but most. This Second Book was certainly a great advance upon the First. If only Hooper had held out.

Reader, do you not feel that this may serve as a warning to you? What is your reaction to this sad episode? With the passage of four hundred and fifty years, this grievous quarrel between friends may appear to be trivial. For many of today's Christians, it is a tempest in a thimble, not worth the repeating. Doubtless, some might even argue that it is wrong to drag it up once more. Yet that view would be grievously mistaken. There was a very serious and important issue at stake in the quarrel at the time, and this issue would come up time and again in the next eighty years. Indeed, this issue is

always relevant. It matters today and to today's Christians. Or it ought to! Reader, it ought to concern you!

What was the issue?

The position taken by Cranmer and Ridley over the vestments was that the whole thing was paltry and a footling quarrel. They thought Hooper should have realised that smaller points were not to be worried about; it was the larger point that had to be grasped. He ought to have kept the big issue in mind! Vestments were a matter indifferent; it was the preaching of the gospel that counted, that was the important thing. Compromise was justified.

Hooper profoundly disagreed. He knew what popish vestments would lead to. Compromise would mean that in the end the gospel would be smothered by Popery. But his main argument was that Scripture must determine what is done in the church in every respect, and that the New Testament is God's mind on the matter, revealed once and for all. The Bible is the authority, the sole authority, in all aspects of the church; in all aspects, for all time.

Cranmer and Ridley replied that things must be allowed to develop or progress in the church; that additions to and deviations from Scripture are allowable as things indifferent; that the church itself can decide in such matters; and that the magistrates have the power to enforce such decisions as laws. And if the magistrate prescribes a law, the citizen must obey it. Every citizen, including Hooper.

This remains the point at issue. Authority! What is the authority in the church? Hooper realised the importance of the matter. Furthermore, other vital questions come from it. For instance: What is the church? How can we find out? What is the church's pattern? Who are the members of the church – are they members merely because they are the citizens of a 'Christian country'? In other words, Hooper was not simply dealing with the question of vestments, but he was raising the same controversy which had already been raised in Zurich in 1525 by the Anabaptists. He did not realise it, perhaps, but that is what it was. It was the Constantine question all over again, in another form. Christ is the king of his church, and he rules it by his word in Scripture. No pope, monarch, politician or magistrate has the say. Ponder again Hooper's words, quoted earlier. They state the issue very clearly. He said:

The Scriptures are the law of God; none may set aside their commands or add to their injunctions. Christ's kingdom is a spiritual one... neither the pope nor king may govern the church... Christ alone is the Governor of his church... The Scripture and the apostles' churches are solely to be followed, and no man's

authority... There is nothing to be done in the church but is commanded... by the word of God...

Was Hooper not right when he predicted that if non-biblical things are allowed and justified on the grounds that they are ‘things indifferent’, that they will eventually become ‘things essential’? Without doubt he was right! Who can question it? Hooper was far-sighted, and could see the evil consequences of allowing anything contrary to Scripture to remain in the church. In his case, the thing which he saw to be wrong was especially the question of vestments. He argued that the Church of England must be totally reformed according to the word of God, that the work during Henry’s reign had only started the reformation, and that it was still incomplete in Edward’s time. But the principle applies to every aspect of the church. And it applies today.

It is highly significant that Ridley also saw future developments quite clearly, in spite of himself! He gave the game away when, as already noted in his words to the Council, he warned Hooper that his stance could only lead to one end – Anabaptism! Exactly so! That was the issue. That was the battle-ground. I repeat, the great question was: What is the authority in the church? Hooper defied the authority of the State and wanted to obey only Scripture. He reached thousands by his preaching, and he told them bluntly that their consciences were not bound by men but by the word of God only. By the use of Scripture, he said, men have the right to judge ‘bishop, doctor, preacher, and curate’. In his writings, he declared that ‘the laws of the civil magistrate are not to be admitted into the church’. All this was in direct contradiction of Ridley, who urged Hooper to obey the laws of England. Hooper refused. He said he would obey only the law of God, which is the Bible. Hooper was right. Ridley was wrong.

What is the authority in the church for you, my reader? Is it tradition? Is it custom? Is it Parliament? Is it society? Is it the pope? Is it what you like doing?

Or is it the only authority – the Bible?

## *Rome Strikes Back*

O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon you... Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel... and he said: "Listen... Thus says the LORD to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's...' ..."

2 Chronicles 20:12-15

*London, 1553 – Edward dies – he had foreseen the coming danger – Mary restores Romanism – persecution – especially of Anabaptists – God brings good out of it*

It was on the 6th of July, 1553, that the sixteen-year-old King Edward VI died, a disaster which sent shivers of alarm through the hearts of all who longed for the full reformation of the church in England. Edward himself had realised what was waiting in the wings, ready and eager to take his place. He knew only too well what the nature of the danger was, even the calamity which would overtake the godly following his death, and the menacing form it would take. His last prayer expressed it very clearly when he said: 'O Lord God, defend this realm from papistry, and maintain thy true religion'.

Edward also knew who would be responsible for it. He not only knew what the danger was, he knew from whence it came. He had taken steps to avert it months, even years before. In 1550, he had written to his papist sister – the Lady Mary – who was his lawful successor, appealing to her to give up her participation in the Mass, but she refused point-blank. In point of fact, she had openly and defiantly made a public spectacle of her continued attendance at the abomination.

A year later, the king invited the Lady Mary to Court, and spoke to her personally and directly on the matter. Nevertheless, she remained adamant, even though the king warned her that since she was a subject of the Crown, she was duty bound to obey him. You see, he tried the Constantine ploy on her, but to little effect, for Mary did not lack influential friends – especially on the Continent. Edward discovered that two can play the Constantine game: Charles, the Holy Roman Emperor, even threatened war against England if Mary was not allowed to continue her attendance at the Mass. Cranmer and Ridley then urged the king to tolerate Mary's rebellion, but Edward was loath to agree, stoutly pressing scriptural arguments upon his advisers. Nonetheless, they resisted the young king's objections, got their way with him, and Mary was allowed to go on in her papist observances.

So it was that as Edward approached the time of his death, he was well aware of the threat to the newly-reformed Church of England; a resurgent and aggressive Romanism would be established when Mary came to power. Hence his final prayer.

As Edward's time drew near, a foolish scheme was hatched to try to forestall the inevitable accession of Mary, and thus avert the disaster which was bound to follow. Upon the king's death, the unwise plan was duly acted out; even Archbishop Cranmer fell in with the mad venture, though with some reluctance on his part, it must be said. The mistaken notion had been devised by some who, out of personal and political motives, tried to divert the succession to the Lady Jane Grey. The brief farce proved very costly, and the folly 'back-fired'. Indeed, it served to increase the popularity of the enemies of the Reformation. It also made the Reformers themselves unpopular with the people, who saw through the misguided and politically motivated effort to protect the work of God. It was a grievous mistake.

It always is a mistake and worse – it is sinful disobedience – to try to fight God's battles with the secular arm. 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal' (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Naturally, Satan uses political weapons, and especially the sword, against the church, but the church must remember the word of the LORD that it is 'not by might nor by power' (Zech. 4:6) that God's cause is advanced in the world. Political manipulation is not a tool for believers to make use of in the cause of God. We shall find, however, that it was employed many times during the years this book deals with, and always with disastrous results. There have been several examples of it already.

Miserable and misused, poor Lady Jane Grey reigned for a mere ten days. For her pains, she was imprisoned in the Tower, and then lost her head upon the block at the stroke of an axe.

Following this stupid debacle, Edward's elder sister, the Lady Mary, was duly and lawfully proclaimed queen of England in 1553. Overnight, by this one act, England became a very different country. She now had a different monarch on the throne; and a monarch who was more different to King Edward it would be hard to imagine!

As I noted in previous pages, some years before, under King Henry, the Church of England had thrown off the yoke of the Papacy, but had retained the trappings of Popery in that the king had become his own Pope in England. But under his son, Edward, the reforms had now advanced to the extent that much of the fabric of Popery had been demolished, and the Church of England had become largely Protestant. Much good work had been done in Edward's reign. The Latin services had been abolished; images had been removed from places of worship; some superstitious

practices and customs had been abandoned; the Bible had been brought back to its rightful position. But although much had been accomplished, much more remained to be done to bring about the full reformation of the State Church and the restoration of the pattern of the New Testament. Hooper and others had seen the dangers of a partial, incomplete reformation, and had given clear and trenchant warnings about it. We know that Hooper in particular had spoken up, stood against unbiblical religion, and had even been imprisoned for his obstinacy. Nevertheless, ‘nests of Popery’ had been allowed to remain in the National Church, and with Mary now on the throne ‘the rooks’ were about to return – as Calvin had warned. Rome was about to strike back. Even the incomplete and infant reforms in the Church of England were about to be abolished as the English Reformation underwent a massive reversal. Popery was to be re-established. The Reformation was to be snuffed out.

Mary had been a staunch and rigid Papist right from her earliest days, and on her accession to the throne of England she quickly demonstrated that she was the true daughter of her father, Henry VIII. Almost the first thing she did after becoming queen, was to send to Rome for the despatch of the papal legate. When Cardinal Pole arrived in England, the queen, Parliament and all the religious authorities knelt before him in order to receive his – that is, papal – absolution for the ‘heresy and schism’ which had taken place in England under Henry and Edward. England was penitent. The pope’s envoy welcomed the ‘prodigal’ back into the fold of the One True and Catholic Church, and incited the people to persecute the heretics.

But, losing no time, Mary did not wait until the legate arrived before putting her plans into effect; nor indeed until Parliament assembled to legalise her actions. Oh no! She started on her Romanising work at once. Engaging in deceit, she even had the audacity, the gall, to lie to the people of England and assure them that ‘she meant graciously not to compel or strain other people’s consciences, otherwise than God shall put in their hearts a persuasion of the truth’. Such words were cheap, but her savage actions spoke louder and longer. Ask those many godly women who were made widows through her barbaric tortures; ask the orphans who saw their parents butchered; ask the children who, themselves, were put to the flames. Ask them about the worth of Queen Mary’s promise ‘graciously not to compel or strain’ them to give up the gospel and go back to Popery. Listen to them:

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying: ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ And a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until

both the number of their fellow-servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed (Rev. 6:9-11).

Mary was a rabid zealot for the Roman Church, for the paraphernalia of Popery, and all the corruptions and superstitions of that depraved religion. She was, indeed, ‘a very Papist of Papists’. Under her rule, Edward’s reforms were quickly abolished, all the good that had been attempted was stopped and reversed. Romanism was restored, and with a vengeance.

Cranmer was immediately detained on house-arrest; others, including Hooper, were imprisoned even before the law granted Mary permission. In October, 1553, all the Acts of reform under Edward were repealed, but even before Parliament could meet to ratify the changes, the abomination of the Mass was brought back into the Church of England, and the use of images and ornaments restored. Under Mary’s tyranny, those Papists who had been removed from office in Edward’s reign were reinstated to bishoprics and the highest political positions; Romanists were installed in key places of influence throughout the land. The English service was abolished, and Latin restored; the writings of the continental Reformers, besides those of Tyndale, Hooper and other Englishmen of the same ilk, were proscribed. Foreign Papists were encouraged to come to England, whereas the foreign Reformers resident in the country and who previously had been welcomed, now were banished. Within two years of these changes, Rome was once again firmly established in England as the State religion. But this was not enough for Rome. Oh no! The Papacy, through Queen Mary, stood ready to vent her spleen on the friends of the Reformation. A price was to be exacted for the break with Rome under Henry and Edward. The battle for the church was about to be waged in blood and flame.

The first to be put to the stake was John Rogers. He had done sterling work in the cause of Christ, in that he had assisted Tyndale and Coverdale in the production of the English Bible, commonly known as Matthew’s Bible. His enemies referred to him as ‘Rogers, alias Matthew’. The treatment meted out to Rogers was cruel in the extreme. His wife was not allowed to see him in prison, and his final glimpse of her and his ten children was as he passed them in the street on his way to the stake. Yet it was said that this good man ‘carried himself as though he was walking to his wedding’.

Rogers was offered a pardon for his ‘offensive’ preaching against Popery, and for his denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation, if only he would recant. The offer was made, temptingly, when the faggots of kindling were already heaped around him. Nevertheless, he refused. He did not waver. He did not flinch. ‘That which I have preached will I seal with my blood’, was his staunch response to the offer. He was accused of being

a heretic. ‘That shall be known at the last day’, came his steady reply. With that, he was consigned to the fury of the flames.

Rogers was but the first. Within four years nearly three hundred men, women and *children* followed in his footsteps and were burnt at the stake because they would not bow the knee to Rome. Some authorities give an even higher figure.

Who were these martyrs? Historians have not always been fair in their dealings with the men, women and children who made up this horrendous number and, as a consequence, there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the kind of people involved. The vast majority of those who were done to death were ordinary men and women – not the famous, learned ministers, bishops and the like. Indeed, it needs to be stated – it is high time that the truth was more commonly acknowledged – that the vast majority, undeniably the overwhelming majority, of those who died for the faith in Mary’s reign were Anabaptists and not members of the Church of England at all. This is not sufficiently well known; even worse, it is sometimes deliberately forgotten and suppressed. It is important to put the record straight, not only for the sake of the memory of the godly men and women who died, but also for the sake of a proper understanding of this struggle to reform the church. Rome knew who her real enemy was! That is why so many Anabaptists were killed by the Papacy and her agents. It was in places like London, Canterbury and Norwich where the largest numbers died – all centres of Anabaptism. Men like Thomas Hawkes at Coggeshall, who was burned alive because he would not have his child baptised in the papistical way, ought ever to be remembered with honour. If the apostle exhorted the church concerning Epaphroditus: ‘Hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life’ (Phil. 2:29-30), how much more should we not forget the likes of Thomas Hawkes who *did* give his life for the faith.

Persecution is a vile game. Rome and the Reformers had been playing against the Anabaptists for a long time. And playing it hard. As we have seen, right from the early days of the Reformation – even in 1525 – Rome and the Reformers had been slaughtering Anabaptists, first in Switzerland, then throughout Europe, including England. For example, fourteen were burned at the stake on the 4th of June, 1535, in Henry’s time, when Cranmer was Henry’s Archbishop. But it was far worse than that. Henry had huge numbers of Anabaptists put to death throughout his reign. Then Archbishop Cranmer and Bishop Ridley carried on the terror during Edward’s time, as they continued to put them to the stake. I have already remarked that it is no excuse to say that some of the Anabaptists held heretical views on the nature of Christ. It is undeniably true that some of them did. But burning is no way to convert a man (or woman or child) who

is mistaken in his view! Even the ignorant spectators at poor Joan Boucher's execution at Smithfield, on the 2nd of May, 1550, during King Edward's reign, knew better than Ridley, when they said that it would have been better to send her to Bedlam rather than to put her to the stake. Yet even John Rogers, just spoken of, called the Anabaptists 'an horrible set of gross and wicked heretics'. He approved of Joan Boucher's slaughter and replied to one who tackled him about it that 'burning alive was no cruel death, but easy enough'. What a mad statement. How foolish and misguided can good men be! Even Cranmer, a mere few weeks before his own execution, was still blindly prepared to assert that she had been 'well worthy to be burnt'.

Such facts illustrate the truth that those who believe in the Constantine system know how to wield the physical sword in the supposed advance or defence of Christ's kingdom. And they are not afraid to use it! To put it bluntly, it seems they just cannot avoid the temptation to pick up the sword. Henry used it. Edward used it. Calvin used it. Luther used it. Zwingli used it. We have looked at Calvin's defence of the barbaric system. It can come as no surprise that, under Mary, the Church of Rome now made full use of the arguments of the Constantine regime. How can men so easily forget the words of Christ: 'For all who take the sword will perish by the sword' (Matt. 26:52)? This is exactly what happened in Mary's time – former persecutors became the persecuted. Former executioners were executed. Former incendiaries were burned. All the while, the Anabaptists were crushed like a nut between them both.

During Mary's reign of terror, the State Church condemned victim after victim following a mockery of a trial, and then handed them over to the State magistrates to carry out the abominable sentence. Of course, Rome never stained her lily-white hands with blood! She never executed anyone – it was the civil authorities who did it! But what hypocrisy! Under the system of Constantine, the Church and the State are one. And that was the principle under which both the Papists and the Reformed churches, including the Church of England, operated. It is not to be puzzled over that Reformers and Romanists – both of them – put so many who opposed them to the sword or to the fire. It was a direct and inevitable consequence of the Satanic doctrine of Constantine. And no amount of white-washing or attempts to explain away the whole sorry and wicked reign of terror will get rid of the stain.

Mary continued with her obstinate madness to the very last. Only two days before she died, five were burned in one fire at Canterbury on the 15th of November, 1558.

But by this time, the people of England had grown utterly sick and weary of the persecution. Not least in the providence of God, Rome had

done harm to her own cause by the wanton shedding of the blood of hundreds of godly men and women. So much so, the people of England breathed a long sigh of relief when Mary died. They had had more than enough of the stench of burning flesh reeking in their nostrils. Mary had effectively turned the nation against Rome. She had sickened the people. God had seen the oppression of his saints, heard their cry and knew their sorrows (Exod. 3:7). God had brought the counsel of his enemies to nothing (Neh. 4:15; see also 2 Sam. 15:31). It was similar to his use of the tyrant Cyrus to further the well-being of the Jews (Isa. 44:28) – God used the vindictive and bloodthirsty Mary to advance the cause of his church in England. And God did it for the same reason. As he declared to Cyrus, so the same could be said to Mary:

That you may know that I, the LORD, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel my elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides me. I will gird you, though you have not known me, that they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things (Isa. 45:3-7).

In addition, by God's sovereign will the persecution during Mary's reign furthered his cause in another way. Many of the friends and supporters of the Reformation in England fled the country during her monarchy, very much as Hooper had done during Henry's time. And with similar results. The Marian exiles travelled and settled on the Continent, where they met and resided with the Reformers. They saw at first-hand the form of church life in places like Geneva, Zurich, Strasbourg and Frankfurt. And they liked what they saw. Typical was John Knox, who had preached on many occasions to King Edward and with very telling effect. When in exile, Knox eventually settled at Geneva, where he studied under Calvin. As I have shown, what he discovered there so impressed him, it eventually led to the Reformation in Scotland taking the Presbyterian and Calvinistic form. No wonder, considering he thought Geneva was 'the best school of Christ on earth since the time of the apostles'.

Although the struggle for the establishment of the New Testament church seemed to go against the godly in England during Mary's reign, the reality is, the battle was positively advanced through the fruitful contacts between the exiles and the continental Reformers. When these exiles eventually returned to England, as they did in the reign of Elizabeth, they brought with them the doctrines and order which they had learned out of the New Testament, through their close, first-hand study of the practice of the continental Reformed churches during their enforced stay abroad. This

would have consequences of the utmost significance in the battle for the reformation of the church. In Edward's time, Hooper had brought back with him scruples about the wearing of vestments. Vestments? The Marian exiles learned things far more advanced than that! Bigger reforms were needed, and these exiles were anxious to see them come about. Oh yes, their time abroad was well-spent. And the church in England under Elizabeth would reap the benefit. Yet once again, God had turned his enemies' fire-power against themselves! They had, in short, built the work they tried so hard to destroy! The martyrs did not die in vain. All honour to their memory.

Reader, it is very easy, I know, to say that the church has no need to fear persecution. It has become a cliché to say that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, but it is true all the same. Apathy and indifference are among our great enemies. We ought to fear *them*. They breed carnal laxity in the church with its consequent decline – decline in spirituality above all. On the other hand, persecution always refines the church and makes her strong and virile. The more the saints are mown down, the more they flourish.

In these dark days at the start of the 21st century,<sup>1</sup> we are surrounded by indifference. We are shrouded in apathy. What is worse, the spiritual indifference is not only a marked feature of the world outside; depressingly it is only too common to find it inside so many churches. What is more, the world we expect to be carnal and thoughtless about spiritual things. It always is. It cannot be anything else. But the churches? How can they be unconcerned about spiritual life? But many are in that condition. Very many are inwardly apathetic when it comes to spiritual obedience. This must be sorted out as a matter of urgency. The churches must be reformed and reforming. And it might well be that the answer to the many prayers for revival and awakening, which are sent up to God in these days, will take the form of an outbreak of stern opposition leading to persecution. Though it would not be pleasant – to state the obvious – in this way the LORD would ‘purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years’ (Mal. 3:3-4). It might even take another Mary, even an Islamic Mary, to bring about real spiritual advance. Perish the thought that we should be so foolish as to need it!

But can we not learn? Let us not be stiff-necked and foolhardy. Will we not reform ourselves, and thus avert the need for a torrent of needless affliction?

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<sup>1</sup> I am thinking of the UK and, possibly, the US.

*Rome Strikes Back*

Come what may, the name of the Lord will be magnified and his church will be purified and reformed. Certainly it is true the church was not destroyed by papist persecutions under Mary. Far from it. It came out of the onslaught in a much stronger position – at least, potentially speaking. It was poised to make a great advance. But would it?

## *The Immoveable Object*

But... Pharaoh... hardened his heart and did not heed them

Exodus 8:15

*London, 1558 – Elizabeth – her problems – restricts preaching – Marian exiles return – demands for reform – Elizabeth refuses – her Popery – her hatred of preaching – determined to have the middle way between Calvinism and Popery – Act of Uniformity, 1559 – the Reformers continue to demand reforms – a split in their ranks – the Church of England divides into factions, yet staying one Church made up of pagans, Papists, Anglicans and Puritans – the Anabaptists outside – they are cruelly banished – the secret churches*

Elizabeth I became queen in 1558 upon the death of her sister. At the news, Church bells rang for joy throughout the land; the fiendish reign of the papist Mary had ended! Wakening from the nightmare, England shook itself and discovered that, to its own amazement, it had survived! The ordeal was over. But in the cold light of the new day which had now dawned, stark realities had to be faced.

Elizabeth inherited a kingdom which was grievously divided, especially over religion. And because of the old Constantine doctrine which continued to dominate Church and State, religious and political questions were totally mixed up. In truth, they were virtually one and the same. So deep-seated were the divisions among the people, with Mary's death the nation might easily have plunged itself into civil war, or been invaded by powerful enemies. Or both!

Why?

When Edward died in 1553, he had left England a Protestant country; not thoroughly Reformed, but Protestant. The nation now ruled its own affairs as an independent, sovereign State, no longer answerable lackey-like to the Papacy. For centuries, England had been enslaved by Rome, but in 1553 she was free. Her freedom was to be short-lived, however. For, as we have seen, in the five short years of her reign, Mary restored papal power in England with all its lavish, carnal, gaudy trappings, along with its many superstitions and abominations; she reversed the partial, infant reforms of Edward; and she reinstated monasteries abolished under Henry her father, as she effectively shackled the country to Rome once again. Furthermore, she was responsible for the public slaughter of hundreds of believers in horrendous scenes of agony in blood and fire, up and down the land. In

this, however, she had gone too far even for many ‘rank Papists’, thousands of whom were disgusted, and turned against Rome. Queen Mary had certainly brought about bitter divisions in the nation.

By the end of her reign, the country, having grown altogether weary of religious executions, was bewildered and frightened by what had happened to it – its sudden, furious lurch back into Popery from Protestantism. How was it possible that a free people could be enslaved to Rome all over again? And all so quickly. How could liberating laws be passed in one reign, yet be completely reversed in a year or two by another sovereign? The common people were utterly at a loss to explain the madness of it all, for the religious musical chairs played out by their political leaders had reduced the goings-on of the State Church to a farce. Clergymen had been celibate; then they could marry; then they were forcibly separated from their wives. The popish Mass in Latin had been changed to a Zwinglian communion service in English, and then back again. In the 1520s, the authorities had spent huge sums to paint biblical scenes on the walls of churches and to set up more images of saints. In 1549, the paintings were obliterated with whitewash, and the images removed. In 1553, the process had been reversed, post-haste. No wonder the people were mystified, and Elizabeth inherited this confusion and disorder. Nor was it over; within a few years, in 1560, churches were to get yet another coat of paint!

But Elizabeth had to contend with far more than mere confusion and division within her kingdom – her very throne, realm and succession as queen were threatened by Papists both at home and abroad. She was hated, and exposed to great danger. Already she had had a taste of it, having been confined to the Tower as a traitor during the reign of Mary. Mary forged links with papist Spain, both through her marriage and by other political arrangements, and these ties had nearly brought about Elizabeth’s violent death. Mary’s advisers had long called for her sister’s trial and execution on the grounds that:

As long as Elizabeth lives there is no hope of the kingdom being tranquillized [made completely papist, they meant]... it is of the utmost consequence that the trial and execution of... Elizabeth should take place before the arrival of His Highness the Prince of Spain.

Although Elizabeth did survive such perils, the danger which surrounded her did not pass away with Mary’s death – the Papists bore her a special grudge since she was the daughter which Henry had fathered by Anne Boleyn after his rejection of Catherine of Aragon, Mary’s mother. They had a personal score to settle with Elizabeth; they regarded her as a bastard, and openly said as much. The pope would come to denounce her, asserting that she had no right to succeed as queen, that her reign was unlawful. Of course, this turned the Romanist subjects of the Crown into

potential traitors, almost inciting them to sedition, and ensuring that treason was a very real threat to Elizabeth. Also, the majority of the bishops and priests she inherited from Mary were Papists. Pulling all this together, although the common people had been repelled by the Marian persecution, so that many had come to detest the Roman system which produced it, a popish rebellion was an ever-present menace to the new queen.

Elizabeth, on coming to power, immediately placed a restriction on all preaching, in that ministers were permitted to read only Cranmer's Homilies in their addresses to the people. The Homilies were those authorised, written sermons, drawn up in a time when proper preaching was practically unknown in the State Church. They were designed to fill the gap, and to provide proper models of real sermons. It is very likely that Elizabeth adopted this measure of falling back to the Homilies in order to prevent the Papists using their sermons as a cover to stir up rebellion against her and to challenge the legality of her reign. But, in effect, it put a stop to the preaching of the gospel, at least for a time.

Parliament assembled in January, 1559 to pronounce Elizabeth's succession truly lawful and beyond all question. The reforming Acts of Henry and Edward, which had been abolished by Mary, were reinstated, and the royal supremacy in the Church of England restored. All who accepted public office were compelled to acknowledge Elizabeth as the Supreme Governor of the Church. An Act of Uniformity was also passed to enforce universal compliance with King Edward's Second Prayer Book. In addition, Elizabeth made four important appointments – Matthew Parker as Archbishop of Canterbury, along with Edmund Grindal, John Jewel and Richard Cox as Bishops of London, Salisbury and Ely respectively.

Matthew Parker had become a Reformer in Henry's time, and his grasp of the truth increased during Edward's reign through his friendship with the continental Reformer, Bucer, while he worked at Cambridge. During Mary's reign, though Parker was a marked man, he did not leave England as many others did, but remained in hiding, protected in the safe-house of a friend. Grindal, Jewel and Cox, however, along with numerous others, spent years of exile on the Continent where their understanding of the New Testament developed to such a pitch that they broke free from Rome altogether. As I observed in the previous chapter, it was in Zurich, Frankfurt and Geneva that the Marian exiles came across Reformed churches which were much closer to the New Testament pattern than the Church of England. And they agreed with what they saw, and enthusiastically wanted the same at home.

Thus, by Elizabeth's own appointments, the majority of the leaders of the Church of England, at the beginning of 1559, were men who had been

greatly influenced by what they had seen and learned of the Reformation on the Continent during Mary's reign. These former outcasts wanted the Church of England to be purified of all the superstitions and corruptions which were the leftovers of twelve hundred years of Popery. On their return, the exiles were openly dissatisfied with the condition of the Church. What is more, this discontent was not only felt by the leaders; there was a general desire for further changes in the State Church, a yearning on the part of many that all Romish errors should be removed, and that the Church of England should fully obey Scripture in all its doctrine and practice. For those who wanted change, biblical change, the prospects looked good.

But there was one great obstacle standing in the way of this widespread desire for change – Elizabeth herself. And she, possessed of a very powerful personality, was headstrong and resolute. Although the leaders of the Church of England demanded reform, she acted like a latter-day Pharaoh, defied them and insisted on her own way. Nor was she afraid to exercise her compelling authority. She staunchly refused to let the reforms go as far as her advisers wanted. She was too strong for her critics, and her obstinate resistance had far-reaching consequences, which were still felt long after her death. In brief, her resistance in 1559 to those who wanted reform meant that hundreds of believers would languish for years in dungeons, some ending their days on the gallows or at the stake; it caused many men and women, along with their children, to be driven abroad as exiles at various times in the next one hundred years; it brought about the English settlement of America; it contributed to the Civil Wars in England; it cost a king his throne and his head; and it led to the shambles of 1662, and the present state of the Church of England. Quite an 'achievement'!

Elizabeth, it has to be admitted, had substantial political grounds for her refusal to pursue the reform of the Church. For one thing, Romanism was very deeply rooted in England, and the Reformation was yet in its infancy. A millennium of Popery, contrasted with only a few years of Protestantism, meant that superstition and not Scripture was more commonly entrenched in the minds and hearts of the people. Besides which, it must be remembered that Romanism will always find a welcome in the natural heart. Its outward splendour, tradition, pomp and all the rest of it, are always popular with the unregenerate. Being mystical, it inevitably attracts its rabid devotees. Elizabethan England was no exception. So, it has to be granted, the new queen was forced to keep a weather-eye open for papist plots and intrigues, inasmuch as there was no shortage of Catholic trouble-makers lurking within her realm. If she would protect her kingdom, Popery must be watched. Added to which, Elizabeth was determined to resist Rome for reasons both personal and political;

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Rome's dismissal of her as the illegitimate daughter of Henry was particularly galling. To complicate matters further, she had good grounds to be afraid that war might break out with France and Spain at any time. For all these inter-connected reasons, she was forced to tread a very narrow and dangerous path. The upshot was, she would not allow the reforms within the Church of England which were demanded of her, for fear they would provoke Rome. If the Papacy was once aroused, she knew it would be very pleased to have an excuse to encourage an invasion to reinstate its domination over England. This threat was very real, and did not recede quickly; after all, the Spanish Armada sailed against England as late as 1588.

In many ways, Elizabeth proved herself an astute and clever queen, especially in matters political and diplomatic, but as far as the church was concerned she was a disaster. The political reasons behind her obstinate resistance to reform were real enough, yet it cannot be denied that Elizabeth had no love for a full reformation of the Church, whether or not there was a risk of a counter-attack by the Papacy. To put it bluntly, she had no interest in – nor any intention of – bringing the New Testament pattern and order into the Church of England. The truth is, in her heart she was not far from being a Papist herself – in many ways, the difference, if any, could not be detected. She loved pomp and religious ceremony, and she liked her clergy to be unmarried. In Mary's reign, she had attended Mass, and she continued to believe in transubstantiation – the pernicious doctrine which alleges Christ's real presence is in the bread after its consecration by a priest at the Mass. What is more, she was known to pray to the Virgin Mary. Her fondness for the frippery of Rome is obvious in this description of her preferences in worship:

She would not part with the altar or crucifix out of her own chapel. The gentlemen and children appeared there in their surplices, and the priests in their copes; the altar was furnished with rich plate, two gilt candlesticks, with lighted candles, and a massive crucifix in the midst; the service was sung... with the sound of organ... cornets, sackbutts... The ceremonies... in their adoration towards the altar, which had been abolished by King Edward, and renewed by Queen Mary, had been retained... the service... was so splendid and showy, that foreigners could not distinguish it from Roman, except it was performed in the English tongue.

Nor did Elizabeth have any fondness for preaching. As I pointed out, it was prohibited at the start of her reign, possibly to avoid seditious sermons by Papists. But she never did like preaching – she always preferred ceremony. Those who longed for reform had reason to grieve that 'there is yet a general prohibition of preaching; and still a crucifix on the altar at Court, with lights burning before it... Three bishops officiate at the altar... all in

rich copes before the idol; and there is sacrament without sermon'. The Bishop of Norwich reported that 'Christmas candles and candlesticks had been removed from the queen's chapel; but they were shortly after brought back again, to the great grief of the godly'. In the light of such statements, it will come as no surprise to learn that Elizabeth felt no sympathy whatsoever with the continental Reformation. She hated Calvinism, and was determined to steer, roughly, a middle course between the Romanists and the Reformers, but with a leaning towards Popery wherever she could. In reality, 'the principle which influenced Elizabeth in remodelling the English Church, was to give as little annoyance to her Romish subjects as possible'.

Elizabeth wanted the order of Canterbury, not Zurich, not Geneva, nor Rome! In this, she acted more like Henry's daughter than Edward's sister. 'I will do as my father did!', she snapped, and she left nobody in any doubt of it. Apart from her love of show and ceremony, Elizabeth had few spiritual principles, or none. She possessed no scruples, no genuine religious convictions. What she really desired above everything else was peace within her realm – peace at any price. She wanted uniformity! One people, one faith, one creed, one ritual, one State Church, one absolute power in all matters both spiritual and temporal; and that power to be hers! But her main concern was political – to establish her realm, securing it against Rome, while at the same time keeping it well clear of Calvinism.

With the Act of Uniformity in 1559, the battle for the reform of the church flared up again in earnest as the old arguments of Hooper's time resurfaced, and the old divisions were revived. Consequently, the first attack on the corruptions in the Prayer Book was once again over the question of vestments. Reader, you will recall that Hooper had protested about the idolatrous practice of ministerial vestments in the early 1550s, and he been imprisoned by one monarch and burned alive by another. But even though that good man was now dead, along with hundreds more through the slaughter during Mary's reign, nevertheless his words lived on, and live on to this day. Abel-like, 'he being dead still speaks' (Heb. 11:4).

The returning exiles now formed a new army of Reformers who took up Hooper's complaints, pushed them even further, and attacked the use of the 'idolatrous gear' as 'the livery of Antichrist', since it 'came from hell'. Jewel ridiculed and denounced the use of vestments, calling the clerical garb a 'stage dress, a fool's coat, a relic of the Amorites' – words which were unmistakeable echoes of Hooper's. It will be remembered how he in his time had declared, both in preaching and in print, that the Church of England vestments were popish. That is, they were either Old Testament or pagan in origin. Whichever it was, there was no place for them in any properly ordered church. If they were Old Testament garments, they had

been abolished by Christ; if pagan, what right had the Church to adopt them? Grindal now raised objections about the mitre. Parker went as far as to pray openly that the Church of England might become like the church in Zurich! Even the construction placed upon the word ‘bishop’ was questioned.

However, not all who wanted reform were agreed as to the right course to secure it, and thus the conflicts of Edward’s day were stirred up afresh. Quarrels erupted between erstwhile friends. Some ministers felt strongly enough about the issues involved to reject all compromise with Elizabeth’s imposition of uniform religion. Over two hundred clergy and a few bishops were of that persuasion; they refused point-blank to take the oath of Supremacy and conform, and hence they were ejected from office. On the other hand, some men argued in the same way as Ridley and Cranmer did when they faced Hooper a decade before. Compromise, they said, is justified on the ground that the corruptions are only trivial questions concerning ‘things indifferent’. Even Grindal, acting contrary to his former criticisms of the partially reformed Church of England ritual, declared: ‘We must not desert our churches for the sake of a few ceremonies, and these not unlawful in themselves, especially since the pure doctrine of the gospel remains in all its integrity and freedom’.

Such men were content to protest and then remain within the Church of England – even accepting high office. They said that Elizabeth would only appoint Papists if they refused. They argued that they must accept office even though this meant having to stomach things they did not really approve of – in order to keep Papists out! But their resistance became very muted once they were comfortably installed in high places.

Others were not convinced by these arguments. They would not fudge the issue. They dared to defy the queen. They did not keep their heads below the parapet, and hope the conflict would peter out. They were not prepared to argue in a negative way and then compromise ‘to keep Papists out’. Oh no! What is more, they agreed with Hooper. Their concerns were not about ‘things indifferent’; the gospel itself was at stake. Mere verbal protest and passive resistance were not enough for them. They were forged of sterner stuff! They would prosecute the battle with vigour. The church must be reformed.

Nevertheless Elizabeth was very clever. Astute, she made sure that the Act of Uniformity was not rigorously enforced, at least to start with. Some irregularities were tolerated, in that some ministers went without the prescribed vestments, or changed the position of the communion table, or introduced various other alterations to the Prayer Book. And they seemed to get away with it! In turn, these acts of defiance then encouraged others

who joined in. In this way, the pressure for reform grew. A kind of genteel lawlessness was connived at – for a while!

Thus, in the early 1560s, several religious parties or groups emerged in England. Though Elizabeth aimed for uniformity in the Church, and sought to get it by force of law, what she actually produced was anything but uniformity! From this time on, there were four main groups within the Church of England, the imposed State Church which comprised nearly all the citizens of the country. *First*, there were the unregenerate masses. *Secondly*, there were the Papists. *Thirdly*, there were the Anglicans proper, those who were in complete sympathy with Elizabeth. And *fourthly*, there were those who became known as the Puritans. *In addition*, outside the pale of the Church of England, the Anabaptists and others like them carried on in their illegal ways.

Let us look at these groups in a little more detail.

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*First*, there was the overwhelming majority of the population – the unbelievers. By the Act of Uniformity, all citizens, including the ungodly, were forced to comply with the Church of England, and compelled to worship God in the decreed way. Attendance on Sundays and specified Holy Days was compulsory, with a very heavy fine being exacted upon offenders and absentees. Consequently, ‘this profane multitude, without any profession of faith and repentance, were forced and compelled by human authority, in the beginning of Queen Elizabeth’s reign, to be members of their Church’. Even so, although the vast majority of the people might be obliged to conform as to their bodies, in their souls things were very different. Outwardly they went through the motions required of them – bowing, scraping, kneeling, crossing themselves and mouthing their garbled responses in the prescribed manner – but all the while, inwardly they were unregenerate. They were still in their sins (1 Cor. 15:17). Yet, because of their outward conformity, they were accounted good members of the Church of England! They would be baptised as babies, confirmed, given the Lord’s supper and, when the time came, buried by the Church, all with the full guarantee that they were true Christians and assured of everlasting life.

What a condemnation of the Constantine system, for that was where the corruption came from. It produced a ‘profane multitude’ who were forced to be – *forced* to be – members of the State Church, and accounted Christians, even though they were without any experience of spiritual grace! Think of it. This unregenerate rabble was compelled to belong to the Church of England! What! Can it be true? *Compelled* to be church

members? Compelled to be church members while unregenerate and profane? How can such a wicked nonsense be justified? Certainly not by the New Testament. The words of Christ condemn such a notion, however one defines the ‘kingdom of God’ – and the term certainly involves the church – for as Jesus said:

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you: ‘You must be born again’ (John 3:3-7).

How can believers and unbelievers be joined together in a church? How can unbelievers be members of a church at all? The members of the New Testament churches were ‘saints, faithful brothers in Christ’, true believers who were obedient to the gospel and who demonstrated the same in their lives in a consistent way (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1-10 etc.). It is admitted, of course, that even in the best regulated churches deceivers might become members, but that is a far cry from a knowing compulsion of the ungodly into church membership! How can pagans and saints both partake of Christ’s supper? How can pagans be allowed to partake, let alone be compelled to do so? God’s word is plain:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

There are two sorts of men in the world – those who ‘walk according to the flesh’, and those who ‘live according to the Spirit’. How can these two sorts of men enjoy spiritual unity? It is impossible. ‘Can two walk together, except they be agreed?’ (Amos 3:3). How can those who ‘walk according to the flesh’ be church members? The very idea is utterly repugnant. It is contrary to all spiritual sense. The Scripture is clear:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his (Rom. 8:5-9).

Our church life, surely, must reflect this, to put it mildly. Must *reflect* it? Our church life must be *based* entirely upon these principles, and only

upon such. In the Bible, the church and the world are separate. One day the saints will judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2), following which, the church and the world will be separated for all eternity. The church and the world must be separate in our experience now, at least as far as we can make it. We are in the world but not of it (John 17:11,14-16). Above all, the church and the world must be separate in our church affairs. (This last statement ought to be self-evident, but I let it stand). It goes without saying that we shall fall short, but this must be our aim and intention. God will one day call us to account for our handling of this matter. Certainly the world should not be in the church!

The division between the church and the world was fudged by many during Elizabeth's reign; and fudged by many who knew better. The unregenerate were not merely allowed to be members of the church in company with genuine believers; they were compelled. No man who desired to honour God should have accepted such a state of affairs. There ought to have been a clear gap between the regenerate and the unregenerate in the churches. An unbridgeable gap, until the unregenerate were born again! But no. Many good men compromised the issue. For one reason or another they accepted that unbelievers were their fellow-members in the Church of England.

Furthermore, this question of church membership would prove to be a battle-ground many times over throughout the period we are considering. Within a few years certain alternative church systems would be devised, even by good men, but these systems would of themselves lead directly to terrible compromises in this area. A partially unregenerate church membership – if not completely so – would be the long term tendency of the very practices these men would adopt. And then, instead of a root-and-branch look at the founding principles of their system, they would aggravate the problem by thinking up schemes to try to cope with the sorry mess which they had produced. I have already hinted at this in the pages on Luther and Calvin.

Nor did this die out four hundred years ago. Certainly not! Things have got worse. I will produce evidence from the writings of the people concerned to show that this is still a vital issue. It is a matter of scriptural importance, with eternal consequences. Heaven and hell are waiting. The issue I am raising at this point is not just a case of who can – or who cannot – belong to this or that local church. It does not concern this temporary life only. The consequences, I repeat, are eternal. As my account unfolds, I hope to be able to show how very serious a matter this is.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See my *Infant Baptism Tested*, where I explore this in detail, in terms of three historical examples; namely, 17th-century New England, the 18th century with Jonathan Edwards, and the 20th century with Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

I am afraid that the demarcation between the church and the world is breaking down in our generation. Not this time because of an enforced conformity brought about by a semi-papist queen, backed by the power of the magistrate. Not because the world is imposed upon the church by the laws of Parliament. Not because we are forced to accept unbelievers into membership. Oh no! Things are far worse than that. As I have just said, some churches have adopted measures which have an in-built tendency to produce an unregenerate membership, at least in part. Others are casual in their admission procedures. Some do not even care. They do not want to be thought ‘strict’, ‘narrow’, ‘judgemental’, ‘hard’ or ‘critical’. Nor do they want to be saddled with the stigma of small numbers. Some, trying to come to terms with what they have produced, and knowing the spiritual condition of their fellow-members, openly talk of evangelising them! Echoes of Luther!<sup>2</sup>

What have we come to?

*Secondly*, in addition to the multitude of rank unbelievers who were members of the Church of England, there were the Papists. They deplored the condition of the State Church. They wanted a wholesale return to Popery.

*Thirdly*, there were those members of the Church of England who were pleased with Elizabeth’s half-way house. For the purposes of this book, they will be called Anglicans from now on.

*Fourthly*, there were those who remained within the Church of England, but demanded further reforms in the direction of the New Testament and away from Rome. They wanted the Church to be purified. Hence the nickname they were labelled with, the ‘Puritans’. They openly stated that the ceremonies, vestments and superstitions which remained in the Church of England were idolatrous, pagan or popish. But, sadly, there was a division even in their ranks. Some of the Puritans expressed their desire for reform in clear ringing tones, and dared to defy the law. Others were content to compromise, proceed quietly, hoping for better days. They argued that there was yet time, the opportunity was still open for them to get reform.

*In addition* to the above, there were the refugee Anabaptists, and those many English men and women who had now joined their ranks, persuaded of and by the scriptural force of their arguments. The queen, supported by her bishops, hated the Anabaptists and would not tolerate their like within

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<sup>2</sup> See my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

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her realm. On the 2nd of September, 1560, she issued a severe proclamation against them:

Her Majesty wills and charges all manner of persons, born either in foreign parts or in her Majesty's dominions, that have conceived any... heretical opinion as the Anabaptists do hold... to depart out of this realm within twenty days... upon pain of forfeiture of all their goods and chattels, and to be imprisoned and further punished as by the laws, either ecclesiastical or temporal, in such case provided.

It must be remembered that in that age, twenty days was a pitifully short time for the sentence to reach all parts of the kingdom; many of those to be banished had no time to sell their few possessions, even if they could find a buyer. In any case, the price was bound to be low, let alone the savage injustice of it all. Many stoutly refused to flee, and bravely accepted the inevitable consequences of their defiance. Elizabeth had to complain time and again that great numbers of Anabaptists still continued to settle in England and formed churches, and that many English families refused to baptise their infants.

Closely allied to the Anabaptists but continuing to practice infant baptism, there were some believers brave enough to quit the Church of England altogether, and worship God in secret, in accordance with their understanding of the New Testament. It goes without saying that this was illegal and highly dangerous, but some valiant souls took their lives in their hands and obeyed Scripture. Some did dare to separate from the all-embracing and all-powerful State Church, and it cost them dear. But God's promise was their reward. A handful formed secret churches. There will be more about them in due course.

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These various groups drew up their battle lines in the early 1560s. There were quarrels between them all, but the main struggle was between Elizabeth and the Puritans, while she kept up a running battle with the Anabaptists. A bruising confrontation with the queen was inevitable.

Elizabeth recovered from an attack of smallpox in 1562, even though it had appeared at one stage that she might die. The Puritans were hopeful that if she did die, a new monarch, more in sympathy with their demands for reform, might come to power. With the queen's recovery, however, their hopes were dashed. The stage was now set for a showdown – the climax of the battle between the Puritans and Elizabeth could not long be delayed. In fact, it would come in 1563, at the Convocation. The queen, supported by the Anglicans, was bound to clash head-on with the Puritans. Which side would come out on top? Would the unanswerable scriptural

arguments of the Puritans calling for drastic reform overcome the stubborn Elizabeth and her love of the ‘middle way’? Would the Church of England advance in reform along the road to Geneva, and thence back to the New Testament? Or would the Church of England be fixed in semi-Popery, saddled with flowery preaching – if any preaching at all – its worship of God cluttered with extravagant ceremony and idolatrous superstition? The next stage for the battle for the church would reach a climax in 1563. Who would be victorious? And if the Puritans lost, what would they do about it?

Reader, what do you think of all this? To which of the groups would you have belonged? Would you have wanted reform? Would you have wanted reform, but have been content to go along with the established system and wait upon events, like Mr Micawber, hoping that, perhaps, something might turn up? Or would you have followed your conscience as enlightened and governed by Scripture? Would you have defied the earthly authorities, and followed Christ whatever the cost?

But why ask such questions in the past tense? Christians must not relegate truth to history books. The issues persist and they will remain relevant to the end of time. What about your Christian life, your church life now – what are you doing? Are you compromising your understanding of Scripture? Are you caught up in a church system that you know is denounced by the New Testament? If so, why do you remain in it? Are you afraid to obey Christ? Is the cost too great for you?

I want to make it clear that I am not an irresponsible agitator; nor am I setting out to cause needless worry for those believers who are doing all they can to reform their local church, sometimes against heavy odds. On the other hand, I am determined to do what I can to arouse the slothful, thoughtless, drifting Christians who populate carnal churches – of whom there are not a few these days. But I have a difficulty; I am well aware that nearly always the wrong people pick up the signals. It is unfortunate, nevertheless it is true. That being so, I want to make the position as clear as I can. The point about church reform is this: It is not just the snapshot picture which is all important; what counts far more is the direction in which the church is going. Your church make look good on paper, say, but is it in reality going away from scriptural life? On the other hand, it may look poor at present to an outside observer, but is it in fact getting closer to the New Testament? The latter is far better than the former. What is more, I also realise that leaving a church is the final step, obviously, and taken only after all other processes have been exhausted. It is a very serious business indeed, and must be undertaken only for the most weighty of reasons. My views of the church would not allow me to suggest a flippant or light attitude to church membership. I have written about it plainly enough in these pages.

Having put in that caveat, I return to what I consider to be the main thrust of the argument. I do so, because it is the need of the hour. I am afraid that many professing Christians are simply not bothered about the issue; they are lax; they are carnal. It has got to be put right as a matter of urgency. Many who compromised themselves in Elizabethan England used specious arguments to justify their accommodation with a corrupt and wicked system. And it would appear that they fathered many children, for the makers of excuses have not been idle down the years. It is a wonder that nobody has published a book of the sort. *A Hundred Handy Excuses for Those who Want to Disobey Christ* would make a catchy title! Oh, of course, it could be disguised, wrapped up in fancy words like ‘rationalisations’ or ‘palliations’ or ‘extenuations’. But excuses it would be, all the same.

How about this:

Unholy compromises are the fashion of the day; an infusion of honest blood is needed, greatly needed. Men are growing utterly careless as to religious truth, because they see the servants of God and the votaries of Baal associated in the same church, and worshipping (together). Sincere loyalty to God brooks not this confederacy with idolaters. Errors were suffered to remain in the National Church for peace sake, and now they have become dominant... It is... clear that every error of doctrine or ordinance is as mischievous as a prophet of Baal, and should not be endured. The world is wide, and men are only responsible to God for their beliefs; but the church should not, within her borders, suffer falsehood to propagate itself. Christians have no right to associate themselves with any church which errs in its teaching. If we see that gross error is rampant in a church, and we join it in membership, we are partakers of its sins, and we shall have to share in its punishment in the day of visitation. It is utterly false that it does not matter to what church we belong. It matters to every man who has a conscience and loves his God... What a blessing it would have been in Luther’s time if the Reformation had been carried out completely! Great as the work was, it was, in some points, a very superficial thing, and left deadly errors untouched. The Reformation in England was checked by policy almost as soon as it commenced... The trees, which were only lopped, begin to send out their branches again, and the errors which were allowed to occupy a secondary place by permission, now come to the front... The only way in which our conscience can be kept clear before God, so that we can walk with him in light, is that we abhor every false way, and renounce everything which is not of God and of the truth. ‘To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them’. When will Christians see this? The Bible, and the Bible alone, is said to be the religion of Protestants, but the statement is a terrible lie; the most of Protestants believe a crowd of other things over and above what is taught in the Bible; they practice ordinances destitute of scriptural authority, and believe doctrines which are not revealed by the Holy Ghost. Happy will the churches be when they shall cast off the yoke of all authority apart from the Scriptures... Away with the commandments of men. Down with the traditions which make void the law of

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God... A thorough purgation is needed; a root and branch reformation is imperatively necessary.

So said Spurgeon. I declare things have not improved since his time and the call is even more necessary today. And I am not thinking of the State Church when I say it. Reader, do you see any application in this for yourself?

## *The Lost Cause*

Hope deferred makes the heart sick

Proverbs 13:12

*Various factions within the Church of England – the Convocation of 1563 – the Puritans lose by one vote – a split within Puritan ranks – Conformists and Nonconformists – the Conformists compromise – their failure – some Puritans give up the fight – become Anglicans – Parker’s measures against Nonconformists – helped by other ex-Marian exiles – stern resistance – Elizabeth fights back – the Church of England deprived of good preachers – ungodliness rampant – some Puritan successes – Puritan worship – the contrast between Anglican and Puritan views – Puritan prophesying and lectures – contrast between Anglican and Puritan views on preaching*

Queen Elizabeth had imposed her Settlement on the Church of England in 1559. By this series of measures, she aimed to force the Church into the mould of her own choosing, which was a uniform religion in all her realm. Yet, although she was determined to have uniformity, what she actually obtained was anything but. The Settlement satisfied only a minority of the people – the Anglicans – who were very content with the middle-of-the-road system which was neither Romish nor Reformed. The Anglicans were also happy with Elizabeth as the Supreme Governor of the Church, and with the Act of Uniformity, inasmuch as they, along with the queen, wanted all Church vestments, ornaments and traditions to be identical throughout the land. And they were avid supporters of her determination to ensure that every citizen conformed to the *Book of Common Prayer*, right down to its smallest detail.

But the Anglicans were in a minority.

The vast majority of the people gave only a grudging conformity to the Anglican Service. And no wonder! They were unregenerate, for a start! How could they form any spiritual judgement? In spite of that, because the law demanded various superstitious observances of them, and if their lives would be made difficult if they kicked up a fuss... well, then, they were prepared to perform the required motions, kneel at the proper places and chant the appropriate responses. They could always sleep during the reading of the Homily, or let the pious words of the flowery sermon float above their heads. If there was any sermon to listen to, that is! The Church would take care of their baptism at birth, marry them, give them the Lord’s supper and in due course bury them. There was no need for them to bother

their heads with the details. The priest would see to that. Leave it to him. In their minds it was probably all mumbo-jumbo, in any case. At every step the Church would assure them that they were certain to inherit everlasting life, no questions asked! No doubt an unthinking conformity to meaningless ritual was for many people a small price to pay for such a blanket assurance.

On the other hand, there were those who did think very seriously about these matters. They had very strong convictions about the queen's idea of a church. They were convinced the State Church was a disgrace and consequently they set themselves resolutely against the Settlement. That does not mean they agreed among themselves, of course. The Papists, the Puritans, the Anabaptists, in addition to some others who separated from the State Church to worship in secret, clashed with each other, but one thing they did have in common; they were all hostile to the Elizabethan Settlement, whatever else they did not agree on.

For these reasons, the Church of England in the early 1560s was totally muddled, lumbering along in its deep-seated confusion. But it managed to struggle on, partly because at first the Act of Uniformity was not as rigidly enforced as it might have been. The chaos and disorder was regarded with a certain amount of tolerance by the queen. But not for long!

Leaving aside for the moment those believers who separated themselves from the established Church to worship with the Anabaptists or to join one of the various secret churches, the main objectors to the Prayer Book service were the Puritans from within the pale of the Church. They took up spiritual arms against the Settlement, and resisted the queen, demanding reform. But Elizabeth and her supporters fought back, and fought back hard. Battle was joined in earnest. Even so, it proved an unequal contest, and from the Puritan point of view it was a losing battle. The climax came quickly – in 1563 at the Convocation – which marked the last real stand of the Puritans within the Church of England. From that time on, they were on a generally downward course. They would have minor successes within the Church, winning lesser skirmishes, but they would never get the upper hand, apart from a short period eighty years later.

The Puritans presented a formal statement of their grievances and submitted a petition for reform at the said 1563 Convocation. They objected to the surplice, and wanted the Genevan gown instead, calling the odious surplice a relic of Romanism. They also asked for the abolition of all the offensive vestments, and an end to 'noxious ceremonies', such as kneeling at the supper, observance of Saint's Days and the sign of the cross in baptism.

After the debate came the vote. It was a close run thing, but the Puritans lost by one! They got fifty-eight votes; the Anglicans, fifty-nine. It was a

bitter blow to the Puritans, who never recovered from this narrowest of defeats. What is more, the cracks already apparent in the Puritan ranks now became wider and positions hardened, so that three distinct parties developed within the Puritan ‘movement’ itself.

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*First*, there were those Puritans who were now prepared to continue to conform despite their beliefs. They had raised their objections and made their protest. These had been turned down in blunt terms. So... what did they do about it? They gave in and compromised themselves. They made the best of a bad job. But were they right? Were they right to remain within the Church of England? How could any Puritan justify remaining in such an adulterated Church? Was it a church at all? How could the conforming Puritans try to worship under the conditions imposed by the Prayer Book? In what ways did they square the glaring inconsistency between their scriptural convictions and the corrupt practices of their Church? How could they reconcile the Church of England with the New Testament? The truth is, they could not. They knew the State Church was defective. They openly said as much. They wanted its many abuses abolished, but Convocation refused; therefore they yielded, observing the offensive rigmarole as by law established! In short, they knowingly compromised.

So why did these Puritans accept the Act of Uniformity and go along with the Elizabethan Settlement? Why did they not leave the Church of England at this point? Other Puritans did, of course. All honour to them. Even some bishops refused to conform, and were deprived of their livings for their pains. But the majority of Puritans remained within the Church. They grumbled, but they stayed.

To be fair to them, the whole notion of leaving the Church was still a revolutionary idea at that time. There was only one Church in England which the State recognised. Twelve hundred years of patristic, Romish, Constantine thought-patterns of a universal State Church, one Church, outside of which there was no Church – perhaps no salvation, even – dominated men’s minds. To try to worship God outside the State Church, automatically made men into heretics, and the authorities exacted severe penalties upon them. Only those wretched Anabaptists and their ilk dared that kind of nonconformity, and were they not the scum of the earth? Besides, look what happened to them! Think about the treatment they received! Get out of the Church of England? Not likely! Religious observance was strictly regulated and enforced by the inflexible law of the land. And the novel idea of quitting the National Church was just unthinkable for the overwhelming majority of the people. It wouldn’t be decent! Why, nearly two centuries later, the Anglican John Wesley could

hardly bring himself to preach the gospel in the fields. It was so novel, it was hardly respectable; it must be sinful!

And, as an attempted justification of their action or inaction, the conforming Puritans could always fall back on the argument of staying ‘in it to win it’. They were willing to go along with the system, bide their time and, they hoped, reform the Church. To be fair to many of them, they honestly thought that they could influence others, and thus bring about their desired aims. They wanted to be ‘useful’.

However, it has to be said that if that was the Puritans’ intention – to stay in to influence the other sections of the Church of England, and by this means get reform – then they failed miserably. In reality, the influence acted the other way. But, in any case, this argument misses the point. God has told us in plain words how we must sort out these matters. In a rhetorical question he asked:

Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

God demands obedience above all else. This principle is so important, it is repeated several times in Scripture. As examples, see Psalm 40:6-8; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:22-23; Hebrews 10:5-7. The priority for the conforming Puritans should not have been to exercise influence over the other members of the Church of England. Their duty was to obey God’s word – as it is for all Christians today. Their first responsibility was not to try to influence the corrupt State Church by staying in it and compromising themselves with its corruptions. Their duty was to worship God according to his truth, his revealed word. It is the same for us. This is what God demands, it is what he seeks. Jesus said:

True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24).

In any case, in addition to pleasing God, it is likely that they would have had far more influence for good within the Church of England if they had left it. However oddly that may read, it is so. After all, a would-be rescuer does no good at all – not for himself nor the one to be rescued – if he jumps into a bog to help the one already trapped in the mire. The illustration is somewhat inadequate, of course. In this instance, both men were in the bog to start with! But if one could have got out, he ought to have done so. He certainly would have more chance to rescue the other.

‘In it to win it’? Who gave them the right to say such a thing? They knew the system they were involved with was popish, even pagan. They

said it was, and said it repeatedly. They abhorred its superstitions and corruptions. They knew that the ungodly were forced to be members of the Church. It was a wicked shambles. The Puritans had demanded reform and it had been flatly rejected. Well then! What should they have done about it? They should have obeyed God's word not to be 'unequally yoked together with unbelievers... Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you' (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

Reader, how often the compromising argument has been used down the centuries. It is trotted out to this very day. Perhaps you are using it yourself! If so, you must understand that Scripture roundly condemns such an attitude. Not surprisingly, the Puritan recourse to it failed. It failed miserably. Frankly, it was a disaster in the 16th and 17th centuries. It always is. In spite of that, many Puritans could not be persuaded to give up their vain hope, until even they, at last, saw the futility of it in 1662, when the vast majority of the then conforming Puritans finally abandoned the Church of England, as hopelessly beyond reform. Even then, a few still did not quit. William Gurnall of Lavenham in Suffolk, for one, remained and continued to conform to its service.

*Secondly*, to complicate matters, there were other Puritans, who formed another group. They compromised even more than the above-mentioned. In short, they practically gave up all fight for reform, capitulated and virtually went over to the Anglicans. To be realistic, it would hardly be fair to call them Puritans from this time on. It is especially sad to record that some – perhaps many – of the Marian exiles belonged to this group, particularly those who accepted high office under Elizabeth. More on this a little later.

*Thirdly*, in sharp contrast to the last-mentioned, there were some Puritans who went the other way. Being forged out of better material, they could not compromise themselves, they would not conform and therefore they were ejected from the Church of England.

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Thus former Puritan friends were divided after 1563. This should cause no surprise, seeing Christ gave clear warnings that this would happen. He said: 'Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth... I have come to "set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law"' (Matt. 10:34-35). If families are divided by Christ and his demands in the gospel, it is no wonder the Puritans were. And their divisions, once apparent, became sharper and more clearly defined as time went on. Elizabeth had thrown her enemies

into total disarray. She, clever politician that she was, had worked the old trick – divide and conquer.

Some of the Puritans who did not capitulate altogether, but nevertheless remained within the State Church, now took the view that since all constitutional methods for reform had been exhausted, they must use their wits to do what they could to get the Church nearer to the New Testament pattern. While going along with the corruptions of the Church, they tried to think of ways to leaven it for its good, to bring about a gradual weakening of the Anglican position, and to arouse a desire within the people for spiritual worship. They adopted means designed to give the Church of England members a taste of good preaching in the hope they would demand it of the authorities. And get it, of course! Thus the conforming Puritans swallowed the compromise, yet at the same time they sought to obey conscience, submit to Scripture and do all within their power to establish a purer form of worship within the Church of England – even though this was against the law of the land.

This battle between Elizabeth and her bishops on the one hand, and these determined Puritans on the other, was bitter. Sad to record, in this fight the queen was much helped by the one-time Puritans whom she had bought off. Principally, Archbishop Parker – one of those who had now retreated from his earlier Puritan position – tried to force his old friends to conform, even on his own initiative and without waiting for the queen. Far from contenting himself with meekly enforcing Elizabeth's edicts, he set about the Puritans with a will, and on his own authority. He introduced the *Book of Advertisements* in 1566, which established a minimum uniformity in vestments, the compulsory use of the Homilies, and a set posture to be adopted in worship. The surplice had to be worn, he declared, with copes and hoods as well on certain special occasions. Preachers were not allowed to compose their own sermons, but were forced to make do with Cranmer's Homilies. Kneeling was compulsory at the Lord's supper. Uniformity was the watch-word. It was a criminal offence not to use the Prayer Book in every particular; not to take the oath of supremacy was high treason. No wonder the origin of the name 'Nosey Parker' is attributed to this man. Of him it has been said:

A hot-headed, intolerant, arbitrary, and vindictive man, he was the model of an Elizabethan archbishop. So zealously did he set about his work that he shocked the statesmen of his age, and at last shocked even Elizabeth herself.

Another Puritan who went back was Jewel. He had given the game away when he published his *Apology* in 1562. In it he wrote: 'This is our doctrine: that every soul, what calling soever he be, be he monk, be he preacher, be he prophet, or be he apostle, is to be subject to kings and magistrates'. The writing was on the wall. Seemingly, Jewel, the former

Puritan, would obey his queen, even though she commanded him to disobey Christ.

Commendably, at this point the resolute Puritans dug their heels in and stoutly refused. Indeed, there is evidence that some of them were being influenced by the Anabaptists at this time. But refusal to conform meant ejection, with consequent poverty and many other miseries. Standing for Christ would inevitably bring them to the life of distress the Anabaptists had long endured. In particular, Parker and Grindal were determined to force the clergy of the City of London to subscribe. Even so, thirty-seven out of one hundred and ten refused – and were ejected.

Bishop Cox, another Marian exile and one-time supporter of Puritan aims, also now stoutly resisted the calls for reform. Having been severe towards Papists in the past, he now turned on his former allies. He went as far as to recognise the Anabaptist influence over some of them, complaining of the Puritans that:

Many obstinately refuse to enter our churches, either to baptise their children, or to partake of the Lord's supper, or to hear sermons. They are entirely separated from... us... they seek by-paths; they establish a private religion, and assemble in private houses, and there perform their sacred rites, as... the Anabaptists.

The determined Puritans fought back against their erstwhile supporters, using all the means at their disposal. Those prevented from preaching, attacked the establishment in pamphlets. This restless, critical and sometimes rebellious group of Puritans continued to be thoroughly dissatisfied. The Reformation in England was only half-hearted; it had brought the church out from Rome, but had stopped short of Geneva or Zurich; that is, short of Scripture as they saw it. They pushed for their long-held convictions. They wanted purity of worship and discipline within the State Church, the reformation of the ceremonies and other similar changes. They wanted good preachers; they objected to the waste of money on cathedrals; they rejected the superstitions such as the service for the Churching of Women, the sign of the cross in baptism, the use of the wedding ring, kneeling at the Lord's supper, and all the rest of it. They made trenchant use of the familiar arguments when they condemned the ministerial garments as 'rags of Antichrist, the gear of the apostate Church'. To wear them, they knew, was but the first step in a return to wholesale Popery. One said:

If we are bound to wear popish apparel when commanded, we may be obliged to have shaven crowns, and to use oil and cream and spittle, with all the rest of the papistical additions to the ordinances of Christ.

### *The Lost Cause*

In the light of this rebellion, the queen was advised to stand firm. She needed no encouragement to resist, but she certainly received it. Her advisers knew her weak spot. They told her that if the Puritans got their way, and if ‘the concern of religion came into popular hands, there would be a power set up distinct from yours, over which you could have no authority’. Elizabeth was easily convinced of this. She would tolerate no other authority than her own; there could be no rival. Therefore she declared that ‘to allow churches with contrary rules and ceremonies were nothing else but to sow discord... to distract men’s minds, to cherish factious men’s humours, to disturb religion and commonwealth, and mingle divine and human things, which were a thing indeed evil; to our own subjects hurtful... nor yet at all safe’.

According to this claptrap, apparently the souls of men are safer, better provided for by the likes of Queen Elizabeth and her all-embracing Church under compulsion, than by the Holy Spirit in churches established according to the pattern of the New Testament!

The bishops were another tremendous hindrance to Puritan demands for reform, since they possessed power both at Court and in the House of Lords. One Puritan sympathiser grieved that the bishops ‘reign as sole monarchs in the midst of ignorant and weak men and easily overreach our little party’.

Very serious consequences came from this bitter attack upon the Puritans. The ejection of faithful ministers, combined with the Anglican policy of pluralism and non-residency (absentee ministers who received stipends for more than one living, even though they did no work for the money), brought spiritual destitution to many parts of the country. The people of Cornwall justly complained that the churches ‘are supplied by men who are guilty of the grossest sins; some fornicators, some adulterers, some felons... some drunkards, gamblers... scarcely any of whom could preach a sermon, and most of whom were pluralists and non-residents’. In 1567, some distressed inhabitants of Suffolk pleaded with Archbishop Parker that their teaching minister might be restored to his pulpit because, as they said, ‘there is not one preacher within... twenty miles’.

In those days, as a direct result of Elizabeth’s policy, only one in five parish churches had a minister of any sort, many of whom ‘could not preach’. In spite of this, former Puritan sympathisers, now in high office and holding the reins of power, continued to eject able ministers from the Church of England just because they would not use the prescribed vestments. The authorities preferred a fool, a drunkard, an adulterer, an unregenerate babbler in the pulpit, rather than a gospel minister, as long as that fool was dressed in popish garb! The outcome was that:

Zealous and learned preachers were suspended... there was no preaching... in vacant places... in some cases, the persons appointed to succeed them had neither good learning nor good name, but were drunkards and of filthy life... notoriously unfit; some for lack of learning, and others charged with enormous crimes; as drunkenness, filthiness of life, gaming at cards, and haunting of alehouses... In the diocese of Bangor it was usual for the clergy, some years after Elizabeth's accession, to pay the bishop for a licence to keep a concubine.

With the clergy in such a decadent spiritual state it is not surprising that the majority of the members of the Church of England, that 'profane multitude', should be no better. The dire condition of the State Church can be judged by the need for Grindal to issue a decree that 'no pedlar be admitted to sell his wares in the church porch in divine service; that parish clerks shall be able to read; that no... disguised persons, or morris-dancers... shall come irreverently into the church, or play any unseemly parts with scoffs, jests, wanton gestures, or ribald talk, in the time of divine service'. No doubt the 'profane and unregenerate multitude' who were compelled to attend the Anglican service, actually preferred the pedlar to the preacher, the morris-dancer to the minister of the gospel. The natural man would surely find plenty of pleasure (or fun) in listening to – and repeating – the mistakes of a parish clerk who could not read, far more fun than in hearing the clear discourses of a faithful preacher of Christ, one who would convict him of his sin.

The Puritan ministers, who were silenced and ejected because they would not compromise, were exposed to grievous sufferings and hardships. Thrown out of the Church of England, they swelled the ranks of the other despised saints, the Anabaptists and similar 'riff-raff'. Their common plight was desperate. Shortage of money and want of clothes brought inevitable disease, many coming to a premature old age in poverty, want and shame. Indeed, many went down to their graves in sorrow.

In harsh contrast to that grim existence, power, wealth and ease associated with an elevated position began to influence the men who, though they had once been fired with enthusiasm for reform, succumbed to Elizabeth's patronage and accepted high office. Their delight at the life and order they had once found in the Reformed churches on the Continent, became but a dim memory which they pushed to the back of the mind. Elizabeth fawned on them, flattered them, bought them; they were no longer persecuted as in Mary's reign. Like a bad dream, those days had long gone for the compromisers who 'grew fat and kicked' (Deut. 32:15) as they accumulated wealth and privilege. Archbishop Parker, for instance, exhibited 'almost regal magnificence'. It was reported of Whitgift (later to be Archbishop) that he 'surpassed even Parker... he travelled with a retinue of one hundred servants, including forty gentlemen with chains of gold'.

He kept ‘a fair stable of horses’ with sufficient weapons and men to the end that ‘he was able at all times’ to furnish a small army for his own use.

‘In it to win it?’ Those one-time Puritans who took that line and compromised, and especially those who accepted office, did not influence the corrupt Church of England. The Church influenced many of them. And how! It made some of them very rich and powerful. And what of the cause of Christ and his scorned servants meanwhile? Well might they have said with Paul, and with the same tone:

We have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonoured! Even to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now (1 Cor. 4:9-13).

It did not all go the Anglicans’ way, however. The Puritan cause was somewhat advanced by the political intrigues of the Papists. The obnoxious Jesuits infiltrated the country, and stirred up strife; the pope excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570; the Papists massacred the Huguenots in Paris on Black Bartholomew in 1572; and there were many acts of treachery by Romish priests in England; all of which gave rise to a nationwide revulsion against the Papacy. At times, it even looked as though the Puritans might actually come to control the Church of England. But on each occasion Elizabeth responded vigorously, silenced many more Puritans, brought them to court, and had them treated as rebels, traitors and fools. The queen declared that the Puritans were ‘greater enemies to her than the Papists’. She certainly backed her words with actions.

Positions became even more hardened. It was bound to happen. The Puritan objections to the Elizabethan Settlement in the early 1560s had been on the grounds of vestments, but as time went on the number of disputed issues increased. For one thing, the Puritans were appalled at the disastrous consequences of enforcing the Homilies on the people instead of allowing real sermons to be preached by real preachers. They knew that Scripture emphasises preaching above the Lord’s supper. They resented the Liturgy, and criticised the insistence on set forms of prayer. Some of them even set up a shadow Church which was ready to seize power in the Church of England given the opportunity. Naturally, this shadow, Puritan, Church, although it had some similarities with the Anglican Church, had marked differences, too.

The central part of Puritan worship was the sermon, in which the Puritans were sure that God declares his word of salvation by the

exposition of Scripture and its application to all the hearers. No read Homily could possibly satisfy their demand for such a living, spiritual ministry. Ministers who read the official Homilies were nothing better than ‘dumb dogs’!

In addition to their stand on preaching, the Puritans began to question the whole matter of authority in the church. Who is its head and ruler? Where does the power and governance of the church lie? In this way, the great issue in the struggle to recover New Testament church life began to centre on the question of authority. What is the rule by which church matters are to be determined? The Anglicans and the Puritans took diametrically opposite views on this vital issue. It was the question thrashed out between Hooper and Ridley twenty years before. It is of perennial duration.

Fundamentally, the Anglicans argued that the Church should decide matters; the Puritans asserted that Scripture should decide. The Anabaptists had long maintained such a view. The Puritans were catching up. The typical Puritan viewpoint was that of William Ames who wrote, in a later generation, that:

The Scriptures do... pertain to the instructing of all the faithful through all ages, as if they had been specially directed to them... The Scripture is not partial, but a perfect rule of faith and manners: neither is there here anything that is constantly and everywhere to be observed in the church of God, which... is not contained in the Scriptures.

The Anglicans opposed this view with vigour. Their most able exponent was Richard Hooker, who first set out the principles which still govern the Anglican system. He claimed that there is no single, definite form of church government revealed in Scripture; that Scripture alone is not sufficient for guidance in the church; that there were many apostolic customs and rites which are not recorded in Scripture; that many of God’s laws can be changed; that reason as much as Scripture must determine the right course in the church as in every day life; that man’s authority has great weight; that things recorded in Scripture are not necessarily to be regarded as commands; that to rely upon Scripture alone would be a very uncertain thing.

All this was a direct contradiction of the Puritans who appealed only to Scripture; their opponents appealed to the Fathers. The Puritans wanted only the practices warranted by Scripture, and they wanted all of them in their churches; their opponents liked the inventions of men. The Puritans were convinced that Christ has not been ‘niggardly’ – only giving his church *some* instruction on *some* church matters; not even *much* instruction on the subject. No! Christ has given *full* instruction as to every aspect of church life – everything that the church needs is in Scripture.

The Puritans were in the right in this debate. One of the purposes of the Scriptures is that the godly might know how to conduct themselves ‘in the house of God, which is the church of the living God’ (1 Tim. 3:15). They give us ‘the pattern of sound words’ which Christians must ‘hold fast’ (2 Tim. 1:13). The apostolic teachings are the last word, since Christ’s promise (John 16:13) – that the Holy Spirit would guide them ‘into all truth’ – was fulfilled. ‘He will teach you all things’ was the promise of Christ to them (John 14:26). And so he did. It is the duty of believers to obey the apostolic commands given in Scripture. ‘Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle’ (2 Thess. 2:15), that is, hold to the apostolic counsel. As Paul said: ‘Keep the traditions as I delivered them to you’ (1 Cor. 11:2). The apostolic commendation is what the saints must seek after. We know what that commendation is: ‘And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you’ (2 Thess. 3:4). And again: ‘But you have carefully followed my doctrine, (my) manner of life...’ (2 Tim. 3:10. See 1 Tim. 4:6). All this is based on the certainty that ‘all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work’ (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is the responsibility of the church to ‘preach the word!... For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables’ (2 Tim. 4:2-4). Exactly so. The Puritans found that Hooker led the Church of England into that very condition. Nor is it unknown in our generation – in other churches besides the State Church.

The Anglicans took the view that Christ has to be helped out by the wisdom of men in the ordering of the church! The Puritans naturally allowed that ‘there are circumstances common to human actions and societies’, some matters which have to be decided in the light of common-sense and circumstances – the actual hour at which to hold a service, for instance. But the final authority in all matters, including church life, for them was Scripture. And this authority extended to all church life, to each and every aspect of it, including discipline. The Puritans aimed to get as close as possible to New Testament simplicity and spirituality in worship; they deplored the riot of motley inventions and corruptions which the Anglican system produced. The Puritan emphasis upon precise obedience to Scripture, coupled with discipline in the church, earned them other nicknames, such as ‘Disciplinarians’ or ‘Precisions’. When one Puritan was told that he was too precise he retorted: ‘Sir, I serve a precise God’.

How did the determined Puritans go about the task of securing this pure, scriptural worship of God within the Church of England? They realised that they could not get Elizabeth to change her mind, so they thought their aims would best be served by improving the quality of preaching, having dismissed the reading of the Homilies as totally insufficient. To this end of improving preaching, they set up what they called ‘prophesyings’ – meetings at which a number of preachers would gather, each man being given the same text to expound with the younger, less experienced preachers going first. For instance, at the Northampton prophesyings the first preacher was given forty-five minutes; the others, fifteen minutes each so that they could correct any mistakes and improve the discourse. Each preacher began and ended with prayer. Discussion and criticism followed. The text for the next meeting would be announced at the close.

But Elizabeth objected to this Puritan emphasis upon preaching, and she fought the battle against them with consummate skill. When Parker died in 1575, she appointed Grindal as Archbishop. He had become Bishop of London in 1559, was elevated to York in 1570, and was now enthroned at Canterbury. He, of course, had been an exile during Mary’s reign and was, in his heart, a Puritan sympathiser, even though he had acted contrary to his convictions. This promotion for Grindal was an astute move on Elizabeth’s part, and she was clever enough not to press him to enforce strict conformity on the Puritans for a little while. But it was not long before she told him that he must put a stop to the prophesyings. He resisted bravely, even rebuking the queen, for his spirit was even now with the Puritans. He told her frankly that she was not competent to interfere in such matters. He wrote to her to remind her of some ‘home truths’ about preaching, declaring:

Nothing is more evident from Scripture than it is a great blessing to have the gospel preached, and to have plenty of labourers sent into the Lord’s harvest... reading of Homilies is good, yet it is not comparable to preaching, which might be suited to the... hearers, and be delivered with more efficacy and affection. The Homilies were devised only to supply the want of preachers... [and] were to give place to sermons whenever they might be had. I hope your Majesty will not discountenance an ordinance so useful, and of divine appointment.

Elizabeth responded in a decisive manner. She would not let an Archbishop tell her what she could or could not do! She isolated Grindal and degraded him for his insolence, virtually depriving him of office. And the prophesyings were duly stopped! Grindal died a few years later, physically blind and cutting a pathetic figure.

The Puritans took other steps to improve preaching, appointing what they called Lecturers, men who were free of all pastoral responsibility and

who simply preached the truth at stated times, usually in market towns. They did not lecture in the sense of the word today. They preached! Despite this strategy they could not make up the loss sustained by poor church life. Preaching in itself is not sufficient on its own, however good it is – it will never replace the whole range of spiritual life within the church. At this point I merely draw attention to the tendency to divorce preaching from church life – I shall return to it.

The Puritans did all they could think of to recover the New Testament emphasis upon preaching, arranging their buildings with a central pulpit. They preached very, very frequently. Some men preached daily. Their manner was to preach systematically through the Scriptures, and crowds flocked to hear them. The Puritans believed in exposition of Scripture, not exposition of doctrine, or talks on the teaching of the church, as the Anglicans preferred. Furthermore, they had a definite aim in mind, subservient to the glory of God, believing that preaching was designed ‘to collect the church and to accomplish the number of the elect’.

But the typical Anglican – Elizabeth herself above all – continued to oppose the Puritan view. The Anglicans did not really like preaching at all. For instance, neither the Morning or Evening service of the Prayer Book stipulates a sermon. Not only that, when they did preach, unlike the Puritans, the Anglicans did not start with the text of Scripture, but they started with a doctrine, a subject or a theme, and then looked for a part of Scripture to pin it on. What is more, the Puritans always made personal and pointed application to their hearers once they had established their doctrine out of the Bible. In contrast, the Anglicans went through a kind of performance which was lifeless and powerless. They went in for displays of eloquence and flourishing orations, whereas the Puritans demanded plain, direct, experimental and soul-saving preaching.

Nevertheless, despite all the efforts of the Puritans who compromised and stayed inside the Church of England, hoping to reform it from within by forming a shadow Church and all the rest of it, the protest ultimately proved to be a failure. The same applies today. The Puritans were betrayed by their ex-friends who accepted high office. The temporary accommodations and compromises of Parker, Grindal, Jewel, Cox and others hindered the purification of the Church – the very purification which they themselves had once hoped for. But beyond the in-fighting which took place between the Puritans and the Anglicans, and among the Puritans themselves, Elizabeth towered majestically above them all. She would not allow the Puritan reforms. And that was that.

Thus, at the end of the 1570s, the split between the Puritans and the Anglicans was complete. And by then it was clear that Elizabeth ruled the Church of England with an iron rod. The Prayer Book was virtually set in

stone. The Church of England would never become a Reformed church, leaving aside the temporary hiccup of the 1640s. The Puritans were defeated. However, it took some of them a very long time to admit it. But they had lost. And lost for ever. The recovery of the New Testament pattern of Christ's church would come about, but it would happen outside the establishment.

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Reader, many very important questions arise out of this struggle between Elizabeth and the Puritans. For example, are you bothered about your church life and whether or not it is in accordance with Scripture? How important is this to you? If you had lived during the reign of the first Elizabeth, you would have belonged to one of the groups in England at the time. Which? The church was a shambles in the 1560s. In many cases it is the same today. It may be your experience even now. If you can get no further than sighing and crying over the corruption of the church, deplored its tragic decline, this is in itself pleasing to God (Ezek. 9:4). But is there anything you can do to rectify matters in your local church?

Further, how important is preaching to you? Does it matter very much to you? The New Testament puts it in a higher position than baptism and the Lord's supper. Do you do the same? Again, what is preaching? How do you define it? Do you think there is much real preaching in these days?

In addition, what do you expect from preaching? Do you get it? If not, why not? You know you are accountable to God. You must think what you can do about the dearth of preaching, which is so common nowadays. Are you doing anything about it? And when you do hear preaching, how do you prepare yourself for it? And what steps do you take to ensure that you benefit by it? Or are you easily robbed of the good seed as the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in your heart? Or is the word choked within you by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches (Matt. 13:18-23)?

Reader, as you have seen, there have been times in England when there was very little preaching of God's word, but just the reading of Homilies, or worse. And dreadful times they were. The godly were forced to endure the tragic loss of preaching, felt it bitterly and grieved over it. Give us back our teaching minister, they pleaded. There is not one preacher in twenty miles, they mourned. What if such days should return? They well might. There is no denying the fact that today in many parts of the country, it is getting very difficult, if not impossible, to hear a real gospel sermon. It is one of the sure marks of God's judgement upon a people, when he removes the preaching of his word. Ahab and Israel came under the punishment of drought, but they had to endure a far greater judgement – the prophet,

### *The Lost Cause*

Elijah, was not allowed to preach to them (1 Kings 17:1-3). The sun beat down remorselessly; far worse, God's silence was deafening. Reader, will a judgement of silence from God come upon us? Error and nonsense will fill the vacuum; myths and fables are always waiting in the wings (2 Tim. 4:3-4). If the word of God is taken from us, the Missal or the Koran will soon be heard in the pulpits of England. Think of that! But nothing can replace the irreplaceable. Nothing but the spiritual and lively preaching of God's word will do. Yet we cannot take it for granted that we shall always have it. Oh no! God has warned us:

'Behold, the days are coming', says the LORD God, 'that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it. In that day the fair virgins and strong young men shall faint from thirst...' (Amos 8:11-13).

Such days may not be far off! We may soon have to use the words of the man in Psalm 74. Some of us may feel they are relevant already. That good man was smitten with grief when the temple was filled with pagan objects which obscured the tokens of God's presence. He cried out:

The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary. Your enemies roar in the midst of your meeting place. They set up their banners for signs... We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet; nor is there any among us who knows how long. O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme your name forever? Why do you withdraw your hand, even your right hand? Take it out of your bosom and destroy them... Arise, O God, plead your own cause; remember how the foolish man reproaches you daily...

Amen to that heart-rending call!

## *The Secret Churches*

For who has despised the day of small things?

Zechariah 4:10

*England, 1570 – the Church of England a shambles – illegal worship outside the State Church – the Anabaptists – persecution – some secret churches formed even in Mary's reign – the Plumber's Hall church, 1567 – the Privye church, 1567 – Fitz – the contribution of the secret churches*

As we have seen, by the 1570s the Church of England was nothing less than a shambles. In a state of abysmal disorder, it was a corrupt and apostate Church, and it had become an atrocious monstrosity; grotesque, it bore little or no resemblance to the New Testament pattern.

It is fair to say that, in the fifty years since Luther had nailed his theses to the door at Wittenberg, much progress had been made in England, much ground had been fought over and conquered in the spiritual battle to recover New Testament church life. Though the gospel sun did not yet shine in its full glory, the long dark night of Popery had given way to the light of opening day. The cruel grip of the Papacy no longer held the people in its power. The Church of England, as well as the nation as a whole, was free of papal rule, and the government of England was in English hands. The effort had been costly, however, and the struggle long and bitter, with a terrible price exacted in blood.

Yet, despite the obvious gains, the Church of England was in a dreadful spiritual plight, locked into the doctrine of Constantine. Consequently, the Church and State persisted in their thoroughly mixed up condition, with diabolical results. For one thing, the combined civil and religious authorities remained deeply wedded to the long-loved idea of executing so-called heretics for their refusal to conform to the uniform Church. Another mark of the degenerate condition of the Church of England was evidenced by the way in which the people became its members. This was by means of infant baptism – just about universal in extent – a rite which amounted to baptismal regeneration at the hands of a priest who solemnly asserted that every infant he sprinkled was thereby ‘regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's Church’. After which appalling statement, the priest was obliged to thank God ‘that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church’. This papist drivel was enforced in the Act of Uniformity of 1559, and every citizen was bound by law to go through with it. What is more, though the compulsion element has long

since been removed, this remains the debased practice of the Church of England to this very day. As I have shown elsewhere, changes are afoot, but the trend is Romeward. The eternal consequences have been horrific for millions. They still are.

By this system, the Church of England had become a veritable mongrel. Some of its members were regenerate, but the vast majority were not. As we have seen, it lumped together four disparate groups, joined into one State Church.

*First*, the profane, unbelieving, ungodly multitude, who were convinced that they were the children of God because some priest had apparently made them so in their infancy when he sprinkled them and had repeated the appropriate formula.

*Secondly*, the various denominations of Papists and associated semi-Papists, who wanted a return to full-blown Romanism.

*Thirdly*, the Anglicans, who loved showy ceremony, the ancient traditions, the customs and superstitions of the Fathers, but hated everything that was precisely built upon Scripture.

*Fourthly*, the Puritans, who demanded reform of the Church and its purification according to the New Testament but who, nevertheless, were prepared to give a grudging conformity to the Prayer Book, while trying to keep up a guerrilla warfare against its many corruptions.

How could this hotchpotch survive, with its jumble of belief and unbelief? After all, the opinions held by the various factions were mutually contradictory and should have blown the whole monstrosity apart. But hold together it did. Why? The Church of England managed to survive this abysmal state of affairs for one reason only – the rigid determination of Queen Elizabeth, its Supreme Governor. She simply imposed her will upon it.

Nevertheless, there were some people in England who were prepared to obey God as he has revealed himself in his word, and who dared to follow conscience. They would settle for nothing less than church life according to the New Testament. It meant, of course, that they had to separate themselves from the State Church, a step totally forbidden by the civil law. The rigours of that law ensured that they suffered blood-chilling punishments for their disobedience. In spite of this, some were prepared to defy the queen and her bishops, even though the authorities were armed to the teeth with the full range of Constantine powers. It was these little bands of stalwart believers who carried on the fight against corruption in the Church of England in order to get back to the pattern of New Testament. Too often they have been passed over, despised and ridiculed.

Who were these people ‘of whom the world was not worthy’ (Heb. 11:38), men and women, who like the parents of Moses ‘were not afraid of the king’s command’ (Heb. 11:23) but defied the establishment to obey Christ? They acted as Moses himself, who ‘by faith... refused... choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God... esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible’ (Heb. 11:24-27). These determined men and women forsook the State Church, refusing to obey laws which contradicted Scripture, for they feared God and not Parliament. And God was with them.

Who were these brave believers?

First, there were the Anabaptists – mostly refugees from persecution on the Continent, but also those English men and women who had been persuaded to join them by the force of their arguments and sufferings. They would not conform to the Church of England, which was apostate in their judgement. For forty years, Anabaptists had been forming churches in England, ever since the days of Henry VIII. As I have already noted, the fourteen Dutch Anabaptists burned at the stake as far back as 1535 were the first of a long line. Many more were put to death down the years under Henry, Edward and Mary. The same happened under Elizabeth. These four Sovereigns of England, aided and abetted by their bishops, hated the Anabaptists, and slaughtered them throughout the 16th century, sometimes in droves. Yet in spite of the horrors of prison, torture and death, and vicious laws framed against them, the ‘heretics’ survived. The measure of their influence and growth – as well as the hatred with which they were regarded – can be justly gauged by the fact that, out of the forty-two Articles drawn up by the Church of England in 1553, seventeen were specifically anti-Anabaptist. The Church authorities, as well as many Puritans, realised who their real and most dangerous adversaries were. This point must be emphasised if we are to get a proper understanding of events. Many of the conforming Puritans – not only the Anglicans – hated the Anabaptists, regarding them as their enemies in battle. But it was not carnal weapons that the Anabaptists fought with – it was the force of their scriptural arguments which was so strong and so much feared. It has been justly said:

The Anabaptists were the most numerous, and for some time by far the most formidable, opponents of the Church. In the judgement of the Church party, and not a few of the Puritans, Anabaptists were heretics of the worst kind, and those who denied the necessity or validity of infant baptism, however orthodox on other points, [were] constantly classed... with... infidels and atheists.

Parker at one stage declined the invitation to become Archbishop of Canterbury, and in explaining himself he said that ‘the realm is full of Anabaptists’. Jewel wrote that ‘we found at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign, large... crops of... Anabaptists, and other pests... As mushrooms spring up in the night and in darkness, so these sprang up in that darkness and unhappy night of Marian times’.

It is interesting to note that, according to these oblique testimonies from bitter opponents, the Anabaptists increased despite – or, perhaps, because of – severe persecution. And they were savagely dealt with. As an example of the sort of treatment they received under Elizabeth, think about the fate of the thirty Flemish Baptists who were discovered in 1575 at worship in Aldgate and arrested. At their trial and in their defence they said:

We are poor and despised strangers, who are persecuted for the testimony of Jesus... We seek no salvation in our works... but we hope to be saved alone through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor do we boast that we are without sin... They also say, we refuse to hear the word of God, because we do not go to hear the preaching of the Church... To this charge we would say, that why we do not hear the preacher, is, that the word of God constrains us so to do; because they are people not fit to attend to the sacred callings of a gospel preacher... if the preachers were such as the apostles required, we should cheerfully hear them – we would be the first and the last in the church. We are also accused... because we do not baptise our infants... We do it out of fear to God, for Christ commands [only] believers to be baptised.

Five of the thirty recanted, and yet were still degraded in public; five were imprisoned and clamped in heavy irons, confined in a damp and dark dungeon which was infested with vermin; the rest were banished, simply thrown out of country, home and work, without a penny. The five prisoners were threatened with death. John Foxe, the martyrs’ historian, wrote to the queen on their behalf. Two of them were released after much suffering, but another died in prison, while the remaining two were roasted alive at Smithfield at six in the morning, until their bodies were reduced to ashes. One of them had nine children. His first wife had been burned at the stake in Flanders. He had later married a widow whose husband had been burned likewise, and they had come to England in the hope that they might find liberty to worship in accordance with conscience. It proved a vain hope under Elizabeth. During his trial, the man promised the bishop that he and his family would quit the country if released; but to no avail. Blood was wanted. The other man who was burned to death was twenty-six years old, and had been married for only about two months when he was arrested.

Yet, despite the savage persecution, the Anabaptists would not give up their determination to serve Christ whatever the cost. Years later, the authorities deplored the fact that even after all the harsh measures which had been adopted to stamp out the ‘heresy’, still ‘Dutch Anabaptists held

private conventicles in London, and perverted a great many'. Thus it was admitted that the movement was growing as more and more Englishmen were joining their ranks. Things had got to such a pitch, the authorities had to complain that even 'some persons of these sentiments have been bred at our universities'. How shocking!

Furthermore, there is evidence that within the Church of England itself there were some who had adopted Anabaptist principles. For instance, as early as 1547, one John Bale, a Church of England minister, denied he was an Anabaptist but, in a book he did present arguments to the effect that Matthew 28:19-20 taught believer's baptism. He also wrote in defence of an Anabaptist who was burned at Colchester. Even more remarkable, is the claim that a Baptist church had been formed in England as early as 1417.

In the early 1550s, in Mary's reign, two separated conventicles were discovered – one in Bocking in Essex, and the other at Faversham in Kent. The Essex church was formed by 'a sort of Anabaptists' from Kent, probably the Faversham people. The churches had at least four ministers along with more than sixty members, all of whom were earnest in the searching of the Scriptures to determine the right way to worship God. They concluded that for this 'the heart before God was required'. They met regularly for Christ's ordinances, the worship of God, and teaching; they contributed to the upkeep of the work of God; they were prepared to travel the eighty miles between the two churches to maintain their mutual fellowship in the gospel – a daunting journey in those days. Indeed, it was at Bocking where they were caught and arrested, after which they frankly admitted they had not taken the Lord's supper in the Church of England for two years, and that their purpose in gathering together was 'for talk of Scripture'.

The members of these secret and illegal meetings, it is true, were unorthodox in that they rejected Calvinism, being of a 'free-will' persuasion. But that was not the reason they left the Church. They practiced believer's baptism, and held that to have communion with the unregenerate is entirely unscriptural. They wanted separate churches made up of the godly only. They further explained that they refused to worship in the established Church because of its superstitions and corruptions. For all these reasons 'they were looked upon as dangerous to Church and State' and therefore they were persecuted, two being sent to the Marshalsea. It culminated in the execution of one of their leaders, Mr Middleton, who was burned at the stake in Canterbury on July 12th, 1555.

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But the Anabaptists were not the only Nonconformists, nor were the Faversham and Bocking conventicles the only detached groups during

Mary's reign; there were others who were willing to disentangle themselves from the State Church. Without question, several small and secret, separate churches existed in London and elsewhere. So much so, the New England settlers sixty years later referred back to them, claiming they were but carrying on the work of such. What is more, there is evidence that other independent churches existed in England even before Mary's time. But all these churches lived in a very dangerous, hostile world. They could not meet in stated buildings at regular hours, nor could they commit much to writing, for obvious reasons. However, at the great day they will form a noble part of the 'last who will be first' (Luke 13:30). Furthermore, despite the bitter treatment they received, the secret churches prospered. They thrived on the hostility.

One illegal London church in Mary's reign began with forty members but rose to about two hundred, and had a succession of pastors. Some of these, however, along with many members, were put to the stake during Mary's campaign of terror. This church was formed simply to be anti-papist, keeping itself clear of her popish measures, the members having no wish to be separate from the Church of England for any other reason. During their time of self-imposed separation, they used the more Protestant, Second Prayer Book of Edward in worship, as opposed to the form of service then employed in the State Church. When Elizabeth came to throne, this separate church dissolved itself in order to rejoin the State Church, now that it was no longer Papist.

In 1567, some one hundred Puritans separated themselves from the Church of England to form what they called a 'gathered church' meeting at Plumber's Hall in London. The members of this separate church comprised only those who were 'gathered' – gathered by their own desire, moved by the Holy Spirit, in contrast to the Church of England, whose members were coerced into that membership and who were forced to attend its services. It does not need to be said that this secret church was formed without Queen Elizabeth's permission. The Plumber's Hall church used John Knox's Genevan Service Book instead of the *Book of Common Prayer* in order to avoid Anglican corruptions.

Eventually, the church was discovered, and its members hauled before Archbishop Grindal to answer for their lawlessness. They explained that they had no intention of making a permanent separation from the Church of England; it was only a temporary measure until the obnoxious laws of Elizabeth were repealed. William Bonam, the pastor, along with twenty-four members, was willing to promise that they would not take the Lord's supper 'in any house, or other place, contrary to the state of religion now by public authority established, or contrary to the laws of this realm of

England'. They also promised not to preach against the Church of England. Having said that, since the Church had silenced good preachers, and until they could hear lively preaching in a church free of Popery, they roundly declared that they were determined to remain apart, whatever the consequences. They justified their action, saying:

So long as we might have the word freely preached and [baptism and the Lord's supper] administered without the... idolatrous gear [that is, Anglican vestments] about it, we never assembled together in houses. But when it came to this, that all our preachers were displaced by your law, so that we could hear none of them in our church by seven or eight weeks, we were troubled and commanded by your courts from day to day for not coming to our parish churches, then we besought us what were best to do. And now if from the word of God, you can prove we are wrong, we will yield to you and do open penance at St Paul's Cross; if not, we will stand to it by the grace of God.

What a spirit! How different is this to the compromises of the conforming Puritans who remained within the Church of England, and were spoken of in the previous chapter. All that these staunch believers wanted was that their church life – the ordinances of Christ – should be free of idolatry and superstition. And, since the Church of England had silenced their true preachers, they had been driven to take steps to put this right. Even so, they had thought carefully about their actions, and they were willing to be proved wrong, but only by Scripture. Furthermore, if they were shown to be in error they would openly acknowledge it and repent. Otherwise, by God's help, they would continue.

Another secret or 'Privye church' was discovered in London in 1567 in Whitechapel Street. This church differed from the one in Plumber's Hall in several particulars – especially in that it was determined to separate, permanently, from the State Church. They called themselves nothing but 'a poor congregation whom God has separated from the Churches of England'. They condemned the established Church because of 'the mingled and false worshipping therein used, out of the which assemblies the Lord our only Saviour has called us'. This false worship, they argued, involved superstitions and idolatrous vestments, the works of Antichrist, such as 'forked caps... surplices, copes... and popish Holy Days'. They appealed to the authorities to abolish 'the manners, fashions, or customs of the Papists' which continued to be practiced in the State Church.

This Calvinistic, separated church was formed on the basis of a covenant in which it acknowledged a threefold ministry of pastor, elder and deacon. Richard Fitz, the pastor, listed three essential points as 'true marks of Christ's church':

First and foremost, the glorious word and gospel [must be] preached, not in bondage and subjection, but freely, and purely. Secondly, to have [baptism and

the Lord's supper] ministered purely, only and altogether according to the institution and good word of the Lord Jesus, without any tradition or invention of man. And last of all, to have, not the filthy Canon Law, but discipline only, and altogether agreeable to the same heavenly and almighty word of our good Lord, Jesus Christ.

Reader, note the stress upon discipline. So strong was this emphasis upon mutual discipline that the church met every fourth day to carry it out. No doubt this was based on the principle that reformation of the church was – and always is – a necessity. How very different to the all-inclusive membership of the Church of England with its little or non-existent spiritual discipline; that is, apart from the slaughter of supposed heretics! How very like the Anabaptists the Privye church was, with their emphasis upon spiritual discipline of church members. Indeed, how very like the New Testament.

This secret church also regarded suffering as an inevitable mark of faithfulness. They went further. The authorities were not only persecuting believers, they said, but the tormentors of the church 'do persecute our Saviour Jesus Christ in his members. Also they reject and despise our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'. Fitz was right to say that suffering is a mark of a true church (2 Tim. 3:10-12). He was also right to note that when men persecute believers, they are, in fact, persecuting Christ himself (Acts 9:4-5).

They closed their church covenant with the prayer: 'God give us strength still to strive in suffering under the cross, that the blessed word of our God may only rule, and have the highest place, to cast down strongholds, to destroy or overthrow policies or imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity or subjection, every thought to the obedience of Christ... and that the name of the eternal Lord God, may be exalted or magnified above all things'.

The subsequent history of the church is unknown – unknown to man, that is – except that we read that it was severely punished for its audacity to dissent from the State Church. Richard Fitz, the pastor, and Thomas Bowlande, deacon, died of gaol fever in Bridewell, while the other members languished in at least six different prisons. Under this kind of onslaught, it is not surprising to learn that the church probably ceased to exist about 1570. But though the men and women might well be silenced in death, and cease to 'groan and cry unto God... the very walls of the prisons about this city would testify God's anger kindled against this land for such injustice and subtle persecution'. What is more, however brief its survival, the church greatly affected the course of the battle to recover New Testament church life in England. Indeed, all the secret churches – both Anabaptist and Puritan – struck tremendous blows in that struggle.

Perhaps the greatest contribution made by the secret churches in the prosecution of the battle to reform the church was that they were pioneers. They took the first step. And how important a step that is. How much easier it is for us who come after, when we can see someone else's footprints! The believers who formed these secret churches showed that it was possible to worship God outside the State system and in defiance of its regulations. It would not be long before a much greater separation from the Church of England would take place. Today, it is commonplace to worship in churches outside the State Church, but it was not always so. How much we owe to these courageous saints who established a kind of bridgehead for us. What a great wrong it is if we forget the price they paid for our freedom!

Another major contribution they made to the advance of the reform of the church was in their use of the covenant. This would be taken up in a widespread way as the battle for the church raged on into the next century. It was a concept which would be used with great effect. Indeed the covenant idea became a major aspect of all Puritanism in the years which followed. We shall meet it again.

There has been a resurgence of the use of the idea of a covenant in recent years, and it is a cause for thankfulness. With this proviso, however – as long as the covenant is carried out in practice! Merely to make it is useless. One great benefit of a church covenant is that it emphasises personal commitment of heart to Christ and his people within the local church; it is not good enough just to give a formal mental assent to a creed, to have a faith in intellectual propositions. That is the curse of Churches founded under the system of Constantine, National Churches where citizenship of a State is the same as membership of the Church. In a voluntary covenant, there is an emphasis upon the individual's engagement and his loyalty to the church, since a mutual contract is made between the members which cannot – must not, dare not – be broken in any but the most serious circumstances. Furthermore, the covenant concept is built upon a sense of equality in the church; it militates against the idea of a hierarchy. Again, by a covenant, church membership is shown to be a voluntary affair. It is far more than a mere nominal attachment by reason of association or birth or whatever. It is certainly something very different to compulsory membership of the State Church, coming about by the so-called baptism of every infant.

For those who may never have seen a church covenant, I include a copy of the covenant which was drawn up in 1978, when the Lowestoft Reformed Baptist church was formed. There are many other examples which could be given, of course. This covenant was the basis upon which

all members joined the church. (In addition, there was a doctrinal statement besides other documents, naturally). The covenant read:

Recognising our own unworthiness and inability, and in total dependence upon God, we covenant to keep our vows first to God and then to each other by the will of God.

First, we covenant to give ourselves to Christ as the head of the church; that is, to submit ourselves to him, to honour and keep all that he has appointed and commanded in his word for the well-being of his church.

Secondly, we covenant to give ourselves to one another; that is, to engage ourselves in all the mutual duties, responsibilities and privileges of members of a local church as appointed and commanded in the word of God – such as prayer for one another, love for one another, fellowship, mutual care and edification, in honour preferring one another, provoking one another to good works, assembling together for the exercise of Christ's ordinances, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit; and in any and every other responsibility of local church members as given in the Scriptures.

Thus, in all sorts of ways the secret churches made a most valuable contribution to the struggle to reform the church; they were pioneers; they were willing to suffer for their obedience to Christ; they used the covenant principle to form their churches; they emphasised church discipline. All these are large and very important concepts. To say the least, the little bands of believers, who dared to disobey evil and cruel laws in order to put into practice the teaching of Scripture, fought valiantly in the spiritual battle for the church. All honour to their memory. Nor did they fight in vain. They shall have their reward. Meanwhile, we with gratitude reap the benefit of their labours.

These several points need stressing today. Too often, the marks of present-day church life are a casual, frivolous attitude, a lack of spiritual commitment, practically no discipline, poor attendance at meetings for prayer, and an easy-come, easy-go mentality. The church and her ordinances are simply not prized as they ought to be. The church is taken for granted. How has this come about? One of the reasons for a low standard of spirituality in the churches is the lack of emphasis upon discipline, it being non-existent in many assemblies. Or, where it is used, it comes far too late, so that it becomes only punishment and not correction. When churches do not discipline, or are only half-hearted about it, then a superficial, shallow Christianity results. The secret churches were strong on discipline. And so should we be. The New Testament churches were.

What does this mean in practical terms? Reader, I want to be down-to-earth and specific. I have tried to be useful all the way through the book. I want to be so now. To take just one commonplace, current example – poorly attended prayer meetings. Is this not a very frequent occurrence?

Well, what is being done about it? What can be done about it? To do nothing, is a dereliction of duty, and will have to be answered for. Looking the other way is not the answer. Wringing of the hands will not suffice. Nor is it good enough for the church secretary to bully and cajole and plead with members to attend; is this not sometimes done in the ‘announcements’? Arm twisting is not the way forward. Nor is it good enough for the elders just to harangue and exhort from the pulpit.

The answer is *discipline*. Are the members spiritual people? Then they will want to come to the prayer meeting. Their lack of desire to come is symptomatic of something very seriously wrong with them. It is this which must be dealt with. Those who wish to join the church must be spiritually-minded people. Prospective members must know from the outset that a full participation in all the spiritual life of the church is expected of them, whatever the cost. And that is how it is; that is how it is going to be. If they do not like it, they should not be allowed to join. They should not even want to join. Spiritual people have spiritual desires and appetites, and they take steps to satisfy them. The Psalmist said: ‘How lovely is your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God’ (Ps. 84:1-2). David addressed God saying: ‘LORD, I have loved the habitation of your house, and the place where your glory dwells’ (Ps. 26:8). He could declare: ‘I was glad when they said to me: “Let us go into the house of the LORD”’ (Ps. 122:1). Do professing believers mean it when they sing the very words of that Psalm, or the rendering of it by Isaac Watts? How frequently these sentiments are expressed:

*How pleased and blessed was I,  
To hear the people cry,  
'Come, let us seek our God today!'  
Yes, with a cheerful zeal  
We haste to Zion's hill,  
And there our vows and honours pay.*

I ask again: Are the words meant? Do those who profess them, make ‘haste to’ the prayer meeting? Do they do so ‘with a cheerful zeal’? If not, why not? And if they do not want to come, why is something not done about it? If churches are so keen to increase their numbers that they tolerate low standards and an unspiritual (frankly, carnal) attitude in the members, they will have to account to God for it.

But what about actual church members – what if they grow slack, and prayer meeting attendance drops off? The answer is that action must be taken if members fail in their covenant vows. This can take various forms and there will be degrees of sanction. But action – not mere words – action must be taken. Richard Fitz was right. It is in the New Testament pattern.

Discipline is a mark of a true church. Merely to deplore shallow spiritual life in church members is not good enough. Something must be done about it, especially in churches which claim to act on the gathered or voluntary church principle. The members are supposed to be regenerate and spiritually active. They are supposed to desire spiritual life. They have asked to join; they have not been asked, let alone forced!

If this sounds too hard, so be it. I realise it will be called narrow and strict. If my words are greeted with howls of protest that we shall lose members, or people will not join us, then I reply that we shall be getting somewhat closer to the New Testament churches again. Admitting that the discipline was extraordinary in Acts 5, nevertheless the effect of it is needed today. And needed badly. After the discipline of Ananias and Sapphira it is recorded ‘so great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things... Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly’ (Acts 5:11-13). Do men fear the church today? Are they afraid to join the people of God? Very often the church goes out of its way to make itself attractive to pagans. It wants to be ‘user-friendly’. Why is it not like the church in Acts 5? Has the church discovered something the apostles did not know? Many churches think they have invented a system which makes the church comfortable for the ungodly, easy-going and tolerant of carnality in its members, and yet pleasing to God *at the same time*. Is it possible? Of course not!<sup>1</sup>

Too often, we want to be popular, and bigger numbers on the roll figure too highly in our calculations. We need to keep in mind Christ’s words: ‘Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets’ (Luke 6:26). Is it perhaps significant that in times of persecution, as when the secret churches were meeting, or later, when (a century later) the famous Broadmead records were written for the Baptist church in Bristol, discipline was being used with great effect in the churches? On the other hand, when apathy and a limp Christianity is in vogue, discipline becomes lax or non-existent. There is a close connection between low spirituality and lax discipline. One thing is certain, if churches and their elders merely deplore superficial spiritual life and thereby tolerate and condone it, they are a party to the offence in the eyes of God. They will have to answer for it.

What is more, church discipline is not designed to maintain church order in an arid, hard way. The idea is not that the church might just be ‘right’. We are talking about the souls of men and women who are in spiritual need. For believers to grow cold, spiritually slack and casual, is not only wrong in the sense of the purity of the church – it is exceedingly

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<sup>1</sup> See the extended note, ‘Inclusivism’, in my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

dangerous for the believers in question. It is a symptom of their spiritual disease. Church discipline is designed to recover them from their spiritual illnesses, to rescue them from their backsliding and decline, and to strengthen them at their weak points. It is not a mark of love to avoid church discipline. Laxity is no sign of kindness. The very opposite is the case. True love for our fellow-believers is best shown by the whole church being engaged in mutual discipline and care. Christ designed church life for that very purpose. After all, 1 Corinthians 5 leads to 2 Corinthians 2:1-11 and 7:8-12. See also Galatians 6:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15. One great aim of church discipline is that the offending brother might be ‘gained’ (Matt. 18:15). Of course it is true that ‘no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it’ (Heb. 12:11). A lawless child is a ruined child. An undisciplined Christian is a walking contradiction.

Reader, let us never forget the saints who formed the secret churches four hundred years ago. Let us remember those godly men and women who paid so dearly for doing what they considered to be their privilege; their privilege, not merely their duty, mind you. If they could see the light-hearted, flippant attitude to church life which is so common today, surely they would be horrified, they would be saddened. Of far greater moment, what does Christ think of it? How much we owe those saints of long ago. One thing we may be assured of – if we let the heritage they left us slip out of our grasp, then they will arise in the judgement and rightly condemn us!

Reader, how much do you treasure the church? How precious are her ordinances to you? How much difficulty are you prepared to put up with so that you can worship God according to your understanding of the New Testament? Or what excuses are you making for yourself in order that you can settle for something less? Is it not a privilege to be a member of the church of Christ? Whatever the cost, is it not worth paying?

## *The Professor's Bombshell*

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword

Matthew 10:34

*Cambridge, 1567 – Cartwright becomes University preacher – 1569, appointed Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity – his lectures on Acts – Presbyterianism in England – controversy with Whitgift – Cartwright banished – the Northampton church – Wandsworth – Elizabeth opposes Presbyterianism – the ‘church within the Church’ – Lloyd-Jones and Westminster Chapel – a biblical look at the idea of ‘a church within a church’ – the idea found wanting*

It is 1567, and the Puritan Thomas Cartwright returns to Cambridge after two years away in Ireland, where he has been serving as chaplain to the Archbishop of Armagh. This Cartwright is a scholarly thirty-two year old, an intellectual of high order. According to Theodore Beza’s estimate, ‘the sun does not see a more learned man’, an opinion shared by others who are in a position to judge. Cartwright has come back to Cambridge to take up his Fellowship at Trinity once again.

He has enjoyed a long acquaintance with the ancient halls of learning clustered around the Cam at the southern tip of the Fens; indeed, he has already achieved a most distinguished academic career in the University. Entering Clare Hall as a boy of twelve, twenty years before this return from Ireland, he had gone on to St John’s two years later as a scholar under Thomas Lever. Then on to London for legal studies in 1556 at the age of eighteen. He returned to Cambridge in 1560, this time as Fellow at Trinity. Then he moved on to become a Fellow at his old college, St John’s, serving as junior Dean for a short while in 1562. After which, back to Trinity as major Fellow until 1565. During these years, he engaged himself in the vigorous Puritan controversy in the University over vestments, and his arguments were successful in bringing into Trinity the reforms already in place at St John’s. Now, in 1567, after two years absence Cartwright is back at Trinity once again, this time to be the University preacher.

It is November, 1569, and two more years have passed. Thomas Cartwright is no longer University preacher, but not because he has been a failure. Far from it. During the two years, the young academic has been owned of God, and his preaching in the University has proved extremely popular. So much so ‘the sexton was fain to take down the windows, by reason of the multitude that came to hear him’. Yet again, after two years Cartwright has been given another promotion. At the end of 1569, at thirty-four years of

age he is the newly-appointed Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University. What an opening to work for further reform! Reform of the Church of England – now! The Puritan means to grasp the opportunity his important position affords him. However, it is not vestments this time. Oh no! The Puritan argument has moved on.

Thomas Cartwright knows full-well what his opening course of lectures as Professor will be. He will lecture on the first two chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. And he knows why. He is convinced he can discern what the great need in England is – the State Church must be reformed. The vestments are idolatrous; the Prayer Book is riddled with popish superstitions; corruption is rife. Added to which, there is a greater question to be faced, a question that embraces all that and much more. And he means to address it.

Cartwright knows what he will lecture on, and he understands why he must do it, and, furthermore, he appreciates that his ideas will meet with opposition. He realises that stormy waters are ahead. Even so, just how stormy? Much worse than he thinks. His first lectures will be his last, and his tenure as Professor of Divinity will survive only a few short months. By December, 1570, he will be out on his neck – out of Cambridge, out of a job! Soon he will be out of England altogether, as an exile! Powerful forces, very powerful forces, will range against him. And try to crush him. Once again, the Church of England will attempt to silence a strong voice which calls for reform.

However, the Church authorities are also unaware of the future. What they do not understand is that Cartwright's lecture notes on the Acts are a primed bomb with a very short fuse. Cartwright himself does not fully realise it, but the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity is about to set a lighted taper to that bomb, and let off a tremendous spiritual explosion. He will be given only thirteen months in which to do it, but in that short time Cartwright will start a controversy which will send shock waves throughout the entire establishment. The Church of England is about to be shaken to the core.

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Reader, you will recall that the Puritans had opened their campaign against Elizabeth's 1559 Settlement of the State Church by an attack on the question of vestments. But, by 1570, they had gone much further in their demands. This came about for several reasons. In the first place, as we have seen in previous chapters, the Puritans had greatly benefited by their contacts with the continental Reformed Churches. These contacts helped them to see that the question of vestments was not the only thing to be considered when reforming the Church of England. That fellowship with

the continental Reformers was one stimulus for the Puritans; it stiffened their resolve to get reform at home – for a while. Then, some English Puritans had also been much influenced by the form of the Reformation in Scotland under Knox, which was itself modelled upon Geneva. And further, they had been disgusted by the obnoxious pomp and regal majesty displayed by very many of the bishops, not to mention their cruel persecution of all who dissented from the established Church in its present form. The bishops' action had drawn their critics' attention to the evils of the system. Hence, for these various reasons, some of the Puritans, at least, were even more discontented by 1570. They were asking more searching questions of the Church of England. They were probing deeper.

The Puritans now engaged in an examination of the New Testament, not just to refute the Anglican use of popish garments in worship, but to determine the answer to such questions as: What is a bishop? According to the New Testament, that is. What is a minister? How many sorts of minister are there? Does the Bible warrant the notion of a hierarchy among ministers? In a sense, these questions were not new in England. The Anabaptists had long since considered the New Testament position on such matters. What is more, even in the Church of England, some had raised these, or similar, questions before this time. For instance, Cranmer and others had corresponded with Swiss Reformers on like topics twenty years earlier. Now the questions were being raised again, and the Puritans who were posing them seemed to be of a mind to get the thing settled once and for all. This time answers would be demanded – scriptural answers! These were the very questions Cartwright was going to deal with at Cambridge. And deal with so eloquently. This was the bomb with the short fuse. It would fall to the Puritan Lady Margaret Professor to explode it.

He duly began his lectures on the book of Acts, and they proved extremely popular, with many flocking to hear him, both his material and the way in which he delivered his lectures providing the attraction. It was said that 'multitudes in the University town and its neighbourhood crowded to hear him, for he united in an equal degree the finest qualities of the scholar and the preacher'. In his addresses, Cartwright drew comparisons between the constitution and government of the Church of England and that of the churches of the New Testament. He openly asserted that the system of the Church of England was grossly defective in that it was very different to the simplicity and spirituality of the early church. In marked contrast to the order in the New Testament churches, the English State Church was worldly, ornate, and hierarchical; that is, its ministers were ranked in ascending importance one above another. It was not merely a question of a few vestments or certain ceremonies which needed to be tidied up – the whole system was wrong!

Some of the Puritans had come to realise that the monarch has no right to rule in the church; that right belongs to Christ alone. In addition, Cartwright now asserted that Episcopalianism itself – the notion of a church run by bishops – is utterly foreign to the New Testament. In saying this, he was laying an axe at the root of the Anglican Church, at a stroke felling its entire hierarchy of priests, bishops and archbishops, with the queen as Supreme Governor of the Church. Cartwright also denounced pluralities and non-residence. Ministers should be in one congregation, and only one. He also rejected the very notion of ‘Holy Orders’. To demonstrate the strength of his convictions, he destroyed his licence to preach, saying that ‘the sole credentials of a teacher... were the intellect and spirit which had been received direct from God’. In other words, he claimed that only God can make a minister, not men with their bits of paper. The warrant for a man to preach the gospel is in the New Testament, not in Acts of Parliament or bishops’ licences.

What did Cartwright claim to find in the New Testament that was so much in contrast to the Anglican scheme? What form of church government did he advocate? Cartwright argued that the New Testament church order was not Episcopalian but Presbyterian. It was of course the system introduced by Calvin in Geneva and was now, in 1570, still the practice there under Beza. It was also the order of the Reformed Church in Scotland. We looked at this system in the chapter entitled ‘Geneva’. Cartwright now stoutly argued from the early chapters of Acts that Episcopalianism was wrong, that the Church of England must reform itself, and that it must adopt a Presbyterian form of government and order.

Not all the Puritans accepted this claim, it must be pointed out, but Cartwright and his followers made vigorous demands for the reform. What they wanted was to keep a territorial, National or State Church, a Church exercising central control and uniform in every particular, but instead of it being Episcopalian, they yearned for it to be Presbyterian in form. Because Cartwright’s views were thoroughly enmeshed in the doctrine of Constantine, he envisaged that the magistrates would continue to enforce this uniform religion. If Cartwright got his way, the Church of England would remain the State Church, but diocesan bishops would be abolished, the *Book of Common Prayer* would be got rid of, and Elizabeth would not be the Supreme Governor of the Church. In fact, there would be no earthly head at all. You can imagine her reaction! And that of the bishops! Cartwright stirred up a nest of hornets, and no mistake!

Many letters were written between the opposing parties – the Presbyterians and the Anglicans – and sundry conferences were called. Cartwright asserted that the Church of England ‘ministry has deviated from the ministry of the ancient and apostolic church’. He flatly denied he was a

'stirrer of new things'. Why, what he advocated was precisely 1570 years old, he waggishly observed! But scriptural arguments counted for nothing on the part of the establishment. Accordingly, on the 11th of December, 1570, Cartwright was presented with an ultimatum. He was frankly told his doctrine was against the religion 'received and established', and he was ordered to 'recant and publicly confess his error'. Cartwright refused. For this he was deprived and forbidden to preach. No appeal was allowed.

But this was not to be the end of the matter. Far from it. If the authorities hoped that they could silence the Lady Margaret Professor and thus put an end to the call for Presbyterianism, they were grievously mistaken. It was only the start of the controversy. Both sides now took up the pen and wrote with vigour upon the issues involved.

The main defender of their position which the Anglicans put up against Cartwright was John Whitgift, who had commenced his academic studies with Cartwright in 1554. He had studied under Ridley and had adopted Reformed views at that time. And, furthermore, without doubt he had been a Puritan in the earlier vestments controversy. All the same, in the late 1560s he was among the number of Puritans who had retreated and gone over to the Anglicans. So much so, by 1570 he had become a staunch advocate of the Church of England ritual. In that regard, his position could now be described as tending somewhat to papistry. But, seeing he had been Cartwright's predecessor as Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, from the Anglican standpoint he was a worthy disputant in the debate over Presbyterianism. What is more, from an intellectual standpoint Whitgift was almost Cartwright's match. But what made him most formidable of all was that he also possessed influence in the right quarters. He could pull important strings of a political nature. To outline his later career in brief: Whitgift soon became a great favourite of the queen, who made him Bishop of Worcester in 1577, and Archbishop of Canterbury in 1583. Living in great splendour, supported by a private fortune, he carefully cultivated the queen's friendship. Yet, everything considered, Whitgift remains something of an enigma to this day. For one thing, in 1595 he produced a revised and strongly-worded Thirty-Nine Articles because the originals did not define Predestination carefully enough. Elizabeth soon put a stop to that kind of talk!

In the conflict with Cartwright, Whitgift was defeated by the quality of scriptural reasoning and intellectual argument he was confronted with, but what he could not secure by disputation, he obtained by political muscle. Though 'Cartwright had the better of his adversary in learning, Whitgift had more power to back his argument'; that is, he possessed carnal, worldly clout in high places. It was Whitgift who, as Vice-Chancellor of the University, deprived Cartwright of his professorship in 1570. Two

years later he went further and deprived Cartwright of his Fellowship at Trinity.

Banished, Cartwright left England to go to Geneva for a while. Later, he became the minister in a church of English merchants in Antwerp, where he stayed twelve years, after which he was appointed minister in an English church at Middleburg for three years. Though, by his writings, he continued to press for reform in England, he really thought that the position was hopeless beyond recovery. Cartwright does appear from time to time in the rest of the story, but his great work was accomplished in 1570 at Cambridge, when he thoroughly exposed the unbiblical nature of the Anglican system in his lectures on the Acts. Even so, some have misread Cartwright's stance. Although he has been called 'the chief of the Nonconformists', this is totally misleading, and confuses the issue. The fact is, the Puritans wished to have a State religion enforced by civil law. It is most important to keep this in mind. The Puritans were most decidedly not Nonconformists. Cartwright had no intention of not conforming to the Church of England – he just wanted a different Church of England to conform to! This point will assume gigantic proportions as the story of the next eighty years unfolds.

The battle of the written word between Whitgift and Cartwright was kept up with energy on both sides; it became long, furious and exhausting. Cartwright argued vigorously from Scripture against the abuses and corruption of the Church of England, demanding that archbishops and bishops in their current form be abolished; that scriptural meanings be attached to the words; that each church should have its own settled minister and elders; that no minister should hold office in more than one church; that patronage – the power to confer a living – should be abolished; and that each church should elect its own ministers. He called for the adoption of these reforms within the Church, with conformity being enforced by magistrates. The Anglicans replied that whereas Scripture is sufficient for the doctrine of the church, it is not sufficient to regulate its form of worship and government. Cartwright retorted that Scripture is sufficient for all matters, and that it is the sole authority in every aspect of church life.

Whitgift's arguments gave the game away. For instance, he did not like Cartwright's insistence on the reinstatement of the New Testament practice whereby each church has a say in the recognition of their own ministers. No, replied Whitgift, for, he declared:

In the apostles' time all or the most part that were Christians were virtuous and godly, and such as did sincerely profess the Word; and therefore, the election of their pastors might be safely committed to them. Now the Church is full of hypocrites, disseachers, drunkards, whoremongers, etc., so that if any election were committed to them, they would be sure to take one like to themselves...

In the apostles' time there was in the church no idolaters, no superstitious persons, no Papists. Now the Church is full of Papists, atheists, and such like. Who saith not therefore what strange ministers we should have, if the election of them were committed to their several parishes?

If this statement by a leading Churchman does not verify what we have already seen of the corrupt nature of the State Church, nothing will. Out of his own mouth... Whitgift clearly knew what the New Testament churches were like, and his assertion, as to their membership, is a clear support for all those who want churches to be composed only of the regenerate. His words will echo time and again through these pages.

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As explained above, not all Puritans were in agreement with Cartwright's views on church government, and as a result of his lectures yet another split appeared within Puritan ranks. From now on one group would be Episcopalian Puritans; the other, Presbyterian Puritans. Both groups remained as parties within the Church of England, however, and both were hostile to the Anglicans proper, even though the Act of Uniformity remained in force! Uniformity indeed!

Since the queen and her bishops would not allow the State Church to adopt the reforms the Presbyterians desired, the followers of Cartwright tried to set up Presbyterianism from within the Church of England – a 'church within the Church' – very much as Luther did when he deplored the lack of spiritual life in the Reformed system in contrast to the churches of the Anabaptists. Now the Presbyterians tried to establish spiritual discipline among themselves, besides trying to improve the quality of preaching – it was largely they who made use of the Puritan prophesying and lectures. The Puritan 'church within the Church of England', which appeared in Northampton in 1571, serves as a fine example of the kind of measures they adopted. The people used the *Book of Common Prayer* on Sundays and Holy Days 'as by law established', but used their own preferred system on weekdays. The young people were catechised using Calvin's catechism, discipline meetings were set up, the church held prophesying, and the officers assembled at regular intervals to measure spiritual progress in the church. All within the Church of England! And it was all illegal!

The Presbyterians actually went so far as to organise a presbytery in Wandsworth in 1572, although this was not a full Presbyterian system, since only one church was involved. However, many Puritan churches in England copied it without being able to complete the job. Presbyterianism proper involves several congregations forming one church, several churches forming a higher court, and so on. The Presbyterians in England

did not get that far in the 1570s; a closer approximation to it had to wait for another seventy years. Nevertheless, the Wandsworth presbytery appointed eleven elders and a lecturer; they exercised discipline to maintain the spirituality of those who partook of the Lord's supper; they adapted Calvin's Service Book to produce their own order and form of worship, calling it the Waldegrave Liturgy; and their ministers wore the Genevan gown and not the Anglican vestments. All this, remember, was within the Church of England, which was supposed to be uniform in every detail. But despite these efforts, with Elizabeth on the throne any hope that the Presbyterians might be able to swing the Church of England to their point of view was forlorn. Cartwright, as noted above, thought the position was hopeless.

Presbyterianism did gain something of foothold in the queen's realm when Elizabeth allowed Cartwright to set it up in the Channel Islands in 1576, to cater for the refugees from Romanism. And this time a full-blown Presbyterian system was put in place. Indeed, it became a miniature Geneva. The government of the church was fourfold: pastors, teachers (or doctors), elders and deacons. The pastor preached, the teacher catechised, the elders ruled the behaviour of the members and the deacons handled practical matters. Church courts were set up – the local assembly, the quarterly presbytery and the bi-annual synod. They used John Knox's Rubric. Great care was taken in admitting members, and the church exercised discipline, including excommunication where necessary.

Nonetheless, the frustrated Presbyterians on the mainland could only watch, hope and dream from afar! Elizabeth would not tolerate what they longed for in England proper, even though she did go as far as to permit a kind of Presbyterianism in Canterbury for some continental refugees. But as long as she was in power, the Church of England would never adopt Presbyterianism. It would not be allowed to, and that was that. In fact, quite the reverse. Elizabeth oppressed the Presbyterians severely, putting a stop to the prophesings, for one thing. Then, in 1583, Whitgift demanded that all ministers subscribe to a further fifteen Articles, including the statement that the Prayer Book 'contains in it nothing contrary to the word of God'; which was the exact opposite of what all the Puritans believed and asserted, of course. In that same year, the queen appointed forty-four commissioners to enforce her will on every minister. Then Cartwright's *Directory of Worship* was discovered by the authorities in 1583. This volume was Mr Travers' *Book of Discipline*, originally printed in Latin, now translated and revised by Cartwright. All the copies at the press were seized and burned by order of the Archbishop. Only one copy survived – it was later discovered in Cartwright's own study – to be eventually published in 1644, in an age when Presbyterianism had become the State

religion. Cartwright himself was arrested during an illicit visit to England in 1585, and was imprisoned for a while. By these persecuting measures Presbyterianism within the Church of England was stifled at birth. This, in turn, would have large consequences in the coming years.

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Far-reaching questions arise out of the abortive attempt to introduce Presbyterianism into the Church of England in the 1570s. And these questions are not merely of historical interest; they have practical consequences for us today. In the first place, the question has to be asked, Were the Puritans – the Presbyterians – right to remain within the Church of England, conform to its system, and then set up a ‘church within the Church’? Why did they not have the courage to obey conscience, separate from the State Church, and set up what they believed to be the New Testament pattern? Others had taken their life in their hands and done it – the Anabaptists and the secret churches. Why did the Puritans not follow?

The explanation is significant. The truth is, Constantine tradition and principles so filled their minds, it seems that the Puritans just could not argue scripturally at this point. They simply gave up all expectation of reform, even though they knew they had a measure of public and Parliamentary support for their aims. The blunt fact is, Elizabeth was too strong for them. Further, they continued with the old ploy – they demanded State enforcement of religion. But the State was determined to enforce Anglicanism. So what could they do? They wanted Presbyterianism, but they could not get it because the State would not give it. Hence they buckled. They sagged. The reality is ‘they do not seem, at any time, to have had a gleam of certain hope. They acted as they did with a forlorn courage’. In this desperate spirit, they set up their little churches within the Church, vainly hoping to enjoy New Testament church life by this misguided method. They yielded to the civil power. They obeyed men rather than God. And then they tried to cope with the sorry mess by introducing various schemes which their fertile minds invented. It was hopeless!

Nor did the notion of ‘a church within a church’ die out in the 1570s. It continues with us to this day. It takes a slightly different form, maybe, but the principle is the same. For instance, when Martyn Lloyd-Jones was the minister at Westminster Chapel, a certain church meeting was held at which there was some confusion. On this issue, Iain Murray commented:

Allowing for the inexactness of the number recorded as present at this meeting, the numbers present at church meetings never amounted to as many as half the membership... and they illustrate the old problem of ‘a church within a church’.

There it is – ‘a church within a church’. But not in the 1570s with the English Presbyterians. Nor in the 1530s with Luther. No! It was in Westminster Chapel in the 1960s.

Now, this notion is completely unknown in the New Testament. No scriptural warrant whatsoever can be produced in its favour. Indeed, the very idea is contrary to the New Testament ethos of church life. Therefore why do Christians bring themselves to use the idea? And why do they employ it, seemingly with so little concern that anything might be wrong with it? Reader, I assure you I am not playing with words. Far from it. The whole idea masks something very seriously wrong in a church. When the Manichaeans tried it, when Luther tried it in the early 16th century, when the Presbyterians tried it in the late 16th century, whenever it has been tried down the intervening years, and when it occurs as a present-day phenomenon, it invariably highlights a bigger, more fundamental problem.

To take up the reference to Westminster Chapel as but one small example of what I want to say. With respect, the sequence of events spoken of by Murray do not illustrate only the notion of ‘a church within a church’. To put it bluntly, they illustrate what happens when the New Testament concept of a church is departed from. Why is it that nobody kept exact figures of those who were at business meetings? Why was it that less than half the membership attended church meetings, in any case? Was that the standard of commitment expected of members of the New Testament churches? Surely not. That is why I say that the New Testament order was not being followed in this instance. What is more, it is not only my opinion. In the light of the episode at Westminster Chapel, the views of Lloyd-Jones himself on ‘a church within a church’ are very interesting. Speaking on the issue, he said:

This whole idea is bound to come to nothing... Can [it] be justified on scriptural grounds? How do you justify this procedure? Many of us, I know, have been tempted to do this very thing in our churches... is there any justification for this on scriptural grounds?... I would go as far as to say that this procedure is one which is directly contrary to the New Testament teaching. If you do regard the church as a gathering of true believers, and if you insist upon the... marks of a true church, where is there even a vestige of scriptural substantiation for this kind of practice? The New Testament is always concerned about the whole church. It does not recognise any separation and special treatment for a nucleus. Its teaching always is that the members of the church are sharing and are participating together in these things and are enjoying them together. Surely the New Testament does not cater for anything but that?

Food for thought.

But, as I have said, the idea of ‘a church within a church’ did not die out with the Presbyterians four hundred years ago. Oh no! Far from it. Many of today’s churches are quite familiar with the idea, if not the terminology. Many elders openly speak of it. First, there is the nominal church, usually well-attended. Within that, there is the spiritual core, the nucleus, the keen, enthusiastic or spiritual members, as opposed to the fringe members, passengers or spectators. The *spiritual* members attend the prayer meetings, and so on; the *fringe* members do not.

What is all this? Who are these *fringe* members? What is the *fringe* of a church? Reader, where do you find this notion in the New Testament? You cannot find the words; you cannot find the idea! So where does it come from? Whoever thought of it? And why?

It certainly can occur as a direct consequence of the Constantine doctrine of State and Church. Luther found it so. This system always produces Churches which, eventually, will be composed of many unregenerate members; indeed a vast majority of such. The notion is brought into play to try to make some kind of sense out of the shambles. That can be one source of the unscriptural doctrine of ‘a church within a church’. But it also features in churches which have got somewhat beyond the Constantine position, but still fall short of the New Testament pattern. It arises out of church practice where there is little or no discipline, where the New Testament pattern is ignored or rejected; in short, where the church is disorderly and lax. Again, it is an idea which is attractive to infant baptisers, since the tendency of infant baptism must be to produce at least a partly unregenerate church membership in the long run. I go further, and say it is inevitable. But, whatever the cause, ‘a church within a church’ has been a common expedient down through the centuries, and it is very much alive today.

I admit that it arises out of a genuine concern to deal with churches whose members fall short of the New Testament standards. The intention is good, but it is still wrong, for all that. I also acknowledge that it is only one of the various but mistaken methods which have been devised, and experiments tried, down the centuries to try to cope with the muddle of unregenerate or ‘fringe’ members. Other notions have been dreamt up, such as ‘visible’ churches or ‘half-way covenant’ churches. Things have got so bad in some cases, that the Lord’s supper has even been thought of as a saving ordinance for church members who are not yet converted!

How far removed from scriptural reality all this is. Patently in the New Testament, church life is for the children of God, and only for them. Only they can belong to the church; only they will enjoy it. As a particular instance of what I am driving at – and as a practical case – take the Lord’s supper. I refer to this because, as was mentioned when looking at the rise

of the Anabaptists, this was the issue which sparked off trouble for Luther, and turned his attention to this ploy of ‘a church within a church’. And I do so for another reason. Discipline at the Lord’s supper is woefully lax in many churches today. It is an issue which is most relevant to us in our current circumstances.

According to 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, the Lord’s supper is a *church* ordinance for those saints who are in communion with the particular church in question. Any breakdown of spiritual unity between the members is a bar to sitting down at the table, therefore every participant has to examine himself on this point. Certainly, the unregenerate have no right to take part. Why, even church members are to be barred from the Lord’s supper if their lives are unworthy of their godly profession. What is more, it must be remembered, if a church does get itself into disorder in this area, fearful consequences inevitably follow. The seeming observance of the Lord’s supper may take place, the external form may be gone through, but, as Paul said to the Corinthians: ‘When you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s supper’ (1 Cor. 11:20). Why not? Because their carnality and disunity had ruined it (1 Cor. 11:21-22). And this is a very serious matter indeed – as the rest of the chapter makes clear. It is so, even today. This was the very issue which cost Jonathan Edwards his position in Northampton, Massachusetts, in the 17th century, when he tried to bring the church away from the nonsensical – the unscriptural – practice which had developed, and thus restore scriptural order. He failed. Luther, referred to a few moments ago, also failed when he tried to establish discipline at the Lord’s supper, it will be recalled.

If only Christians would stick to the New Testament! In previous pages, I mentioned that very many teachers of the Constantine persuasion, including such giants as Calvin, have mangled Scripture, especially the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30,36-43), to justify this nonsense of mixed churches – mixed regenerate and unregenerate members. ‘The field is the church’, they say, when it is abundantly plain that ‘the field is the world’. The *world*, not the *church*! Until the end, of the age the godly and the ungodly will be mixed together in the world. But not in the church! When men think that the church is meant to be a mixed multitude – regenerate and unregenerate – then sooner or later they must invent some sort of idea along the lines of ‘a church within a church’ to try to ginger-up the spirituality of the church. It is a clear signal that the New Testament order is not being followed. Instead of inventing these schemes, we should get back to the pattern of the apostolic churches.

For the working out of these vital practical issues in more detail, and with historical references, see my *Infant Baptism Tested*.

### *The Professor's Bombshell*

The experiments to try to move the Church of England into Presbyterianism in the 1570s and 80s failed. But this does not mean that Cartwright's work was wasted. No! In particular, one of his many hearers at Cambridge in 1570 had been greatly affected by the lectures. That young student – Robert Browne – was a spiritual man who possessed a fertile mind, a mind which began to work. Thinking very deeply about the nature of the church, Cartwright's attentive pupil came to some very definite convictions about the order of a church. And once he saw a scriptural argument, like a bull-dog Browne would not let go. Certainly not! He was prepared to follow wherever Scripture led him. And that was in a direction Cartwright could never have dreamed of. A direction which would, eventually, bring liberty to millions, liberty from the bondage of Constantine. A massive step was about to be taken along the road back to the New Testament church order and life.

## *Thinking the Unthinkable*

Oh, give thanks to the LORD... who remembered us in our lowly state... and rescued us from our enemies

Psalm 136:1,23-24

*Browne – student of Cartwright – rejects Puritan views of a State Church – Separatism – anathema to nearly all others – his recovery of the New Testament principle of separate churches – student days – at Dry Drayton – his preaching in Cambridge – has a nervous breakdown – goes to Middleburg – with Harrison at Norwich – forms first Separatist Congregational church about 1580 – the spread of Separatism – persecution – the Norwich church emigrates to Middleburg – Browne disputes with Cartwright – publishes important books – quarrels in the church – goes to Scotland – imprisoned – returns to England – conforms to the Church of England – despised by all – the seed of Separatism well sown and takes root – a biblical look at the role of the magistrate – misunderstandings of Calvin and all followers of Constantine – the advance of Separatism – today's neglect shameful*

By the mid 1570s, the Church of England was in a very troubled and unsettled condition. In the eyes of many believers, it stood in desperate need of much reform, if it was ever going to be a church in the sense of the New Testament. And these critics gave open voice to their convictions even though this was contrary to the law of the land. The State Church was under attack on two fronts; it had two main opponents. It was censured by the Anabaptists and various other scattered, hidden and separated churches from without; and it was criticised by the Puritans – both Episcopalian and Presbyterian – from within. But there was one great and constant obstacle to reform, one resolute defender of the Anglican system – Queen Elizabeth herself. She and her bishops weathered every storm, warded off every onslaught; or so it seemed. However, as if two fronts were not enough for Elizabeth to contend with, a third and far more penetrating assault upon the fabric of the Church of England was about to be launched. This attack would come from a new group of Puritans; which group, though very small in number to start with, would prove the most devastating in the long run.

This new category of antagonists arose as an unexpected result of Cartwright's lectures at Cambridge. By 1573, Robert Browne – he was the student of Cartwright's mentioned at the end of the previous chapter – was taking an altogether more radical line than his former Professor. Browne was daring to think the unthinkable, and was prepared to act according to

his understanding of Scripture, whatever men might say. He realised that the common or conforming Puritan approach was mistaken. The Puritans demanded reform in the Church of England, whether of vestments, ceremonies or the system of church government, but they were prepared to wait until the authorities – the queen, the magistrates and the bishops – were willing to move and give it to them. Browne came to the opinion that this approach was wrong. It was misguided! The reforms were needed, but the waiting was wrong! He came to the conclusion that it was right to act without the consent of the authorities. He would later publish his views in the now-famous book *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Any*, the title of which became the catchword of the third group, who were nicknamed ‘The Separatists’. At this distance, and in the very different circumstances of today, it is almost impossible for us to appreciate how great a leap Browne took. Those who were prepared to take it with him certainly paid a high price, but being so devoted to the cause of Christ they willingly met the cost.

Before looking in more detail at the rise of the Separatists it is essential to paint in the background. Frankly, separation from the State Church was anathema. Although this point has repeatedly been made before, it needs to be emphasised yet again. Throughout the world, religion and politics for more than a millennium had been thoroughly mixed together. That is, ever since the days of Constantine. The Roman Church, of course, claimed to be the Universal Church, while the Reformed Churches were National, State Churches. To separate from any of these was to become Stateless. It was not only unthinkable, it was virtually impossible. Civil rights and privileges were so closely linked with religious rights and duties, that even if a man totally disagreed with the dogma of the Church, hated its policy, and rejected its practice, he could do nothing about it. He could not leave Church. He dare not. There was nowhere else to go. Of course, this is not quite the whole story. As we saw earlier, the Anabaptists had stepped outside the State-Church system in 1525. Then again, we have looked at some brave souls who did forsake all for Christ to separate themselves from the State Church of England to form secret churches. These all accepted – even embraced – the horrendous consequences involved. But such courageous men and women were minute in number.

However, during the late 1570s a very important step in church reform was about to be taken; the Separatists emerged in England. These Separatists were determined upon reformation according to the New Testament without waiting for permission from the authorities. Indeed, they went further, and said that the State Church cannot be reformed, that it is pointless to try, and that separation from it is the only way forward. In any case, the State has no say, no right or power in religion, they declared.

In voicing these sentiments, there were unmistakeable echoes of Hooper, thirty years earlier. Now, this stance was in marked contrast to both the Anglicans and the Puritans who, while they disagreed on many things, did hold certain principles in common; one great unifying bond between them being their love of Constantine. Hence, they both believed in a State Church, in religious uniformity and its strict enforcement by the magistrate. They both rejected the idea of religious tolerance. It was anathema to them both. Consequently, over this issue of tolerance as opposed to an enforced uniformity, a bitter conflict was in the making. On the one hand there were the Anabaptists and the newly-arisen Separatists; on the other, the die-hard advocates of an imposed State religion.

Down the years since the 1520s, the State had changed its opinion many times and changed it rapidly, swinging from Romanism to the Reformed faith, and back again. There had been many radical changes to the Prayer Book and the Articles during those turbulent years. Yet, with their Constantine views, those in power demanded that all citizens must follow the lurches of the State and change their opinions, too. And overnight! The common man just had to keep in step with the State – and to do so he had need to be nimble. But not all were quite as adept as the vicar of Bray – that satirical clergyman who so adapted himself as to keep his living through all the changes from Charles II to George I. Whoever was in power, and whatever view was ‘politically correct’ at the time, that agile man adjusted his ‘persuasions’ quickly enough to remain the ‘vicar of Bray, sir’. But as I say, not all citizens were as speedy in modifying their opinions. And slowness could prove costly, seeing it was very dangerous to be caught holding a view that the State had recently changed its mind on. What is more, if only the Puritans could have become top dogs, they – like the Anglicans – would have forced all men to conform to their way of State Puritanism. And that is exactly what they did seventy years later when they got their hands on the reins of government. That is the way the mind works when it is ruled by Constantine and not Scripture.

So, to go back to the events of the last chapter for a moment, even as Cartwright and Whitgift were quarrelling about Presbyterianism, nevertheless they were agreed on one thing at least – intolerance. The Puritans were persecuted by Whitgift, but if they could get their hands on power, the Puritans would likewise persecute the others. Anabaptists and Separatists would have suffered grievously under their regime, and every bit as badly as they did under the Elizabethan Settlement. Cartwright baldly stated that heretics should not be pardoned even if they repented. He went on to say that they ‘ought to be put to death now... if this be cruel or extreme I am content to be counted so with the Holy Ghost’. All that the Puritans lacked was the power, but if they could have got the chance they

would have forced all men to conform to their point of view. Madly, Cartwright even insisted:

The magistrate ought to enforce the attendance of Papists and atheists on the services of the Church; to punish them if they did not profit by the preaching they might hear; to increase the punishment if they gave signs of contempt; and if at last they proved utterly impenitent, to cut them off.

How magistrates were supposed to be competent to judge ‘who had not profited’ by preaching, what tests they could apply to read men’s hearts, is utterly beyond my comprehension. It was a ridiculous demand. Surely this prerogative is God’s alone.

In adamant opposition to the Anglicans and the Puritans, the Separatists argued that religion should be free of the State. More than that, they began to see that the New Testament knows nothing of State Churches with an all-embracing membership. They argued for the New Testament position of churches made up of believers only, churches whose members all give credible evidence of regeneration. The Anglicans accepted all who had a certificate of infant baptism. The Puritans demanded more. But not enough! It was the Separatists who argued for the New Testament order, and spoke of ‘gathered’ churches. In this there were echoes of Richard Fitz and others in the secret churches, as well as the Anabaptists.

These were important principles. They remain so. Yet they are in danger of dying through neglect nowadays. Some Christians have greatly distorted views of the church. They look upon it as a body in which they ought to evangelise, hoping to see those members who are not converted brought to Christ! We looked at this in the previous chapter. Where is this idea found in the New Testament? Churches, according to the Bible, are composed of saints, not the unconverted. People like the pioneer Separatist Robert Browne saw this and stood for it. We ought to be thankful to God that he did.

The more numerous Puritans very strongly opposed the Separatists, denouncing them in no uncertain terms. Elizabeth also reacted with vigour against all her opponents. While she kept up her discipline measures to force the Puritans into line, that was far too good for the Separatists and the Anabaptists whom she lumped together. They were to be persecuted! Literally, to death!

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It is time to trace how Puritanism developed into Separatism through the life and teaching of Robert Browne.

Robert Browne was a man who, in his day, provoked strong reactions. He still does. But, alas, many who are indebted to him and his stance have

either never heard of him – or worse – they openly disown him. In truth, he made many enemies both in his own day and since. It must be borne in mind that much of the information about Browne comes only through the writings of his opponents, and as such it must be treated with caution. That having been said, on any reckoning it has to be admitted that God greatly used the man’s courage, discernment and faith to advance the cause of Christ. Browne recovered nothing less than the New Testament concept of the church, with its distinct, separate churches at Corinth, Philippi, Rome, Ephesus and the like, churches which have no central control or hierarchy. Episcopalianism is foreign to Scripture, but so is the Presbyterian notion of synods and other ecclesiastical courts ranked in order of importance. Likewise, Browne rejected the Elizabethan Presbyterian view that one professing Christian makes a church, and that the elect within a nation form a State Church. A treatise published by the Brownists when they were in Middleburg, entitled *Antichristian Abominations Yet Retained in England*, spoke against the notion of hierarchy, and said that ‘every particular church, with its pastor, stands immediately under Christ, the Arch-pastor, without any other ecclesiastical power intervening, whether it be of prelates, of synods, or any other invented by man’. Each church is separate from every other church and is answerable to Christ alone, they maintained. These churches ‘ought not to be governed by popish Canons, courts, classes, customs, or any human inventions, but by the laws and rules which Christ has appointed in his Testament’. For those who followed him, Browne got rid of words and notions like ‘parish’ and ‘diocese’. He stoutly resisted the view that the magistrate should exercise discipline in Christ’s church. (But there is more to be said as we will see). He also asserted that discipline is essential in Christ’s church – so much so, without it the church ceases to exist – but it must be spiritual discipline, exercised by the church itself upon its own members. He said:

The essence, substance, and life of the... church... [is] the keeping of the covenant by outward discipline and government... nothing can make a... church except... the power of Christ to separate the unworthy.

He further declared that the magistrates:

Have no ecclesiastical authority at all... they may do nothing concerning the church... To compel religion, to plant churches by power and to force a submission... by laws and penalties, belongs not to them.

For all that, there is some evidence that Browne was somewhat confused about the position of the magistrate. At times, he did allow a place for the enforcement of scriptural religion by the civil authorities. The full-blown doctrine of religious liberty and tolerance had a few more years to wait

before it would be put forward with all its New Testament vigour and clarity.

On the qualification for the ministry, Browne asserted that it is not the magistrate who gives the right for a man to minister the gospel. It is the gift of God, ‘by consent and ratifying of the church’, which qualifies a man for the ministry, he said. The magistrate cannot make a minister; nor can he take a man’s ministry away. He argued that churches are made up only of those who freely covenant together to walk in Christ’s ordinances. When he said ‘let them know that the Lord’s people is a willing sort’, he was simply echoing the New Testament. But this kind of teaching was hated by those who formed Churches on the basis of Constantine coercion.

How did Browne come to these earth-shattering views?

Robert Browne, who was born into a family of wealthy merchants near Stamford about 1550, went to Cambridge in 1570, probably drawn to his particular college because of his Puritan sympathies. There he attended Cartwright’s epoch-making lectures on Acts. Graduating in 1572, he became a schoolmaster for about three years, probably at Southwark, during which time he engaged in open-air preaching at the Gravel Pits at Islington. Upon an outbreak of the plague in 1578, he returned to his father’s house. Increasing scriptural light was breaking in upon him all the while, and, as his understanding developed, so he sought to obey to the best of his ability.

Moving to Dry Drayton, five miles from Cambridge, he joined the household of a conforming Puritan minister, one Richard Greenham, who had been recently appointed rector. Greenham was a ‘godly pastor, a good preaching minister’, most diligent, practical, kind and able, a very gentle man. Rising at four each week-day to preach to the farm labourers, he then followed them over the fields to bring home the truth to their hearts by spiritual conversation. He aimed ‘to deal wisely and comfortably with an affected conscience’. In which aim he succeeded, for ‘his masterpiece was in comforting wounded consciences... God used him... as an instrument of good to many, who came to him with weeping eyes and went from him with cheerful souls’. His house at Dry Drayton became a kind of Puritan academy with various Puritan ministers staying there from time to time on extended visits. Much profitable, spiritual discussion took place. Sadly, Greenham came to the end of his ministry at Dry Drayton – when he was nearly sixty – in a depressed and lonely condition. He thought he had accomplished no good at all, except to one family; the place had remained obstinate against the gospel. But Greenham was mistaken, for he did do much good in his time and it lived on after him. He died of the plague in 1594.

Such was the godly man under whose roof Robert Browne took up lodgings in 1578. Greenham was a loyal Anglican, but though he was an Episcopalian, he was also earnestly resolute over simplicity in ministerial dress and in worship. Into his household came Browne, who was becoming more and more grieved over the lamentable state of the church. The young man studied and debated much to discover the proper scriptural order of the church; ‘night and day he did consult with himself and others’. Cartwright’s lectures were having their effect. Browne began to see that the trouble was not merely that the bishops were bad in their behaviour, that they were wicked, but that ‘their whole power and authority’ was unbiblical. Greenham, too, had attended Cartwright’s lectures but he tried to defend Episcopalianism against the new-fangled Presbyterianism in his many discussions with Browne. Browne retorted that the bishops were a miserable failure, they were not calling the people from their sins, they did not preach the word of God.

Greenham must have been very impressed with the younger man for he invited him to expound the Scriptures at the family table after meat. Then he went much further; without the necessary licence from the bishop, he let Browne teach openly in the parish. So gifted was the young Puritan that the Mayor and Vice-Chancellor gave him leave to take charge of Benet church in Cambridge for six months – still without a licence! Radical indeed! Browne’s brother did take the trouble to obtain the necessary seals for him but he refused them. ‘To be authorised... to be sworn, to subscribe, to be ordained, and to receive their licensing, he utterly disliked and kept himself clear in these matters’. Furthermore, he refused payment for his labours. He would allow no one to call him a hireling! ‘I preach to satisfy duty and conscience’, he said. During the course of his preaching, he declaimed against the power of bishops to license or silence preachers, going on to assert that ‘the kingdom of God is not... whole parishes but rather of the worthiest be they never so few’. The bishop, naturally, resented this attack upon the very fabric of the Church of England, and deprived him of the pulpit.

This was an important period for the young man, and it had a lasting effect upon him and, especially, his later health, in mind as well as body. He passed through spiritual torments and anguish as he tried to maintain his high level of spiritual activity while, all the time, developing his arguments, both in public and in private, in the face of much hostility. What he was putting forward was all so new and revolutionary. And what about all those good men – the vast majority of them – the other Puritans, who saw things differently? What of Richard Greenham and the many godly ministers who stayed at Dry Drayton? Was it possible that he, Robert Browne, was the only man in step? Were all the others wrong?

How many perplexing doubts must have flooded the young man's mind. The strain under which he laboured smote him down, and he was compelled to rest for six months, probably suffering from what is commonly called a nervous breakdown. All the same, he distinctly felt that the Lord was leading him and trying him; indeed, that the Lord was preparing him 'to a further and more effectual message'. He wept much over the state of the church and his own lonely position. Where could he find anyone like-minded?

Reader, do you sympathise – even empathise – with this? As you compare the present day church with the New Testament, what do you find? Does the present low state of the church – its disorder and confusion – grieve you? Surely you cannot be complacent over its sad condition! Do you feel the loneliness of your position? To mourn over the ruinous state of the cause of God is a mark of grace. Passages like Psalm 137 tell us that God is pleased with those who are distressed at Zion's low condition. What is more, when God was going to slay the wicked he put a mark on his people who were to be spared and said: 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done in it' (Ezek. 9:4). Evidently, God is delighted with those who are grieved when his cause is defiled. See also Jeremiah 13:17 and the Book of Lamentations. Those who long for the church to prosper and who are distressed when it declines, may take some comfort from the certainty that God reads their hearts and will honour them for their sadness at the fallen state of his church.

When Browne recovered his health, he went to Middleburg in the Low Countries, probably in 1579-80; perhaps he was influenced by the knowledge that Cartwright, his former Professor, was preaching in a Puritan congregation there. While we cannot be certain, it is most likely that Browne had conversations with the Dutch Anabaptists during his time in Middleburg. His views were moving all the time; from Episcopalianism to Presbyterianism to... to what? It is very likely, also, that the Dutch told him of the large Anabaptist settlement at Norwich, in East Anglia. At that time, there were nearly five thousand Dutch people in Norwich – a huge number for the period; indeed, it was a majority of the population. Besides which, Norwich was the centre of a fervent Puritanism, possibly made even more radical by the influence of the many Anabaptists in the locality. Robert Harrison, a fellow-student of Browne's at Cambridge, was by this time the master of a charity hospital in the city. Harrison had previously renewed his acquaintance with Browne, meeting him at Cambridge when he, Harrison, went there to get the bishop's licence to enable him to preach. Browne had dissuaded him, calling the licence 'trash and pollution'.

Browne now moved to Norwich from the Continent, lodged with his friend, and by powerful arguments won him over to the position he had come to adopt on the Separatist order of a church. Browne, being a very persuasive and dogmatic man, convinced Harrison that ‘we are to forsake and deny all ungodliness and wicked fellowship, and to refuse all ungodly communion with wicked persons [for] God will receive none to communion and covenant with him which as yet are one with the wicked’.

Was Browne right? Of course he was. The church and the world have nothing in common. The church and the State must not be mixed up; the church must be separate from the State. Its members must be separate from the world. Does not God’s word say the same? ‘Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God’ (Jas. 4:4). See 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

There was only one logical outcome of this kind of reasoning in which the two men were engaged, and they decided to take the momentous step. Accordingly, they formed the first Separatist church in England sometime during 1580-81. It was of the Congregational order. When I say ‘the *first* Separatist church’, it will be realised that this is not strictly true – secret separate churches had been formed in England years before, as we saw in the previous chapter, and the Anabaptists had been forming churches for more than half a century. But the one at Norwich is usually reckoned to be the first Separatist church. On a set day, a small group met together in Norwich, established various points from Scripture, made a covenant and gave their consent to join themselves to the Lord and to one another as a church under elected pastors. They also established principles of discipline and rule among themselves.

Browne maintained that each church should have the offices of pastor, teacher, elders, deacons and widows. He thought that churches should be independent, separate and distinct, but they ought to associate for common ends. He had in mind some kind of arrangement whereby the separate churches could meet to redress matters which concerned them all. It is clear that Browne did not follow the Anabaptists blindly; he did not accept their views on baptism, oath-taking and other matters. Yet it is true to say that this rise of the Separatists marks the decline of the Anabaptists in England – they were so similar in many respects that the one gradually replaced the other, especially after Baptist churches were being formed. Besides opposing Episcopalianism, Browne was decidedly against Presbyterianism on the other flank, saying that if it were to be established then there would be a thousand popes instead of one! Hence the Congregational order of the Norwich church; that is, the church governed itself by its church meeting; it did not submit to any outside rule. It would

appear that John Milton, about a century later, must almost certainly have read Browne's works.

Browne was an effective preacher, attracting a hundred or more in congregations gathered in conventicles and private houses in and around Norwich. He was also a fervent advocate of the despised Congregational system. On hearing that there were people at Bury St Edmunds, in the neighbouring county of Suffolk, who were interested, he went there and for his pains was imprisoned – the first of thirty-two similar sentences. The cells were often so dark he could not see his own hand, while he was kept in close confinement with the vilest of humanity. Because of sore persecution, the Norwich church members were minded to flee, but from prison, Browne, their pastor, staunchly urged them to stand and testify. However, in the end they all 'were fully persuaded that the Lord did call them out of England' in order to continue with their religious practices. Hence they emigrated, as a church, to Middleburg in 1581 – showing further evidence of sympathy with the Anabaptists.

Reader, are you not challenged by this? Ordinary people like ourselves, yet people who so desired New Testament church life as they understood it, they were prepared to give up home, friends, job and country in order to have it! What paltry excuses to avoid spiritual commitment are made today in many churches by not a few professing Christians! 'It always rains harder on Sundays', as was said by one wit. To attend worship is 'difficult'. Excuses which are offered to avoid attendance at church do not seem to keep the same people away from the concert hall, the shopping spree or the football match! The sense of priority in many Christians is sadly awry these days. The career, the house, the locality, the garden, the holiday, the school... anything and everything but the church, comes top of the list. Jesus Christ comes last. Are these people Christians in anything but name? Browne and his fellow-believers from Norwich will rebuke us on the day of judgement if we adopt second-rate standards for our church life, if we consult our convenience at the expense of obedience to God.

On first arriving in Middleburg, the Separatist church from Norwich joined the Puritan congregation already established under Cartwright, but after a while – when Browne was released from prison and arrived – they separated. Browne quarrelled with his former teacher, Cartwright, over the status of the Church of England, which Browne was convinced was not a true church, that it could not be reformed and must be forsaken. Cartwright disagreed. This issue would prove to be a bone of contention between the Separatists and the Puritans for a long time to come. A vehement, excessive correspondence ensued between the two men. Browne, it has to be said, was the offender, pouring torrents of abuse on Cartwright,

distorting the Presbyterian's arguments beyond recognition. Browne suffered another nervous attack, and his letters reflected the instability of his mind at the time.

Regrettably, the Congregational church in Middleburg with Browne as pastor, began to quarrel among themselves, and they debated hotly over many issues – some most unedifying – and the church grew confused. In 1583, the disputes became so bad that Browne was censured by the church, whereupon he resigned and sailed for Scotland accompanied by a few families. Harrison remained with the church, but after his death in 1594 it ceased to exist.

This period, for all the mistakes and troubles, was not unproductive, however. Browne published three works in these months in Middleburg, and one in particular proved to be of enormous influence and importance. I have already mentioned it – *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Any*. His writings were greatly feared by the authorities, so much so that in 1583 two ministers – Elias Thacker and John Coppin – were both hanged at Bury St Edmunds, just for distributing the works of Browne! They languished for seven years in prison before their trial, then they were hanged with Browne's books tied about their necks. Their crime? They had read, and led others to read, the 'heretic's' writings.

While in Scotland, Browne even tried to reform the Scottish Presbyterian system, launching attacks on John Knox himself! He was never one to avoid a fight, even against overwhelming odds. He met with no success in this attack but was put into prison for his pains. On his release he eventually returned to England, preaching where he could.

However, the years of struggle, torment, and many grievous imprisonments, by this stage had wrought havoc on his body and mind. There is no doubt that by this time the poor man was not always sane. He had in his earlier days dared to think the unthinkable; and what is more, to do it. Now he did the unthinkable again! He gave up his Separatism, conformed to the Church of England, and in 1591 became a rector in Northamptonshire, where he settled for forty years. But there is some evidence that, in his heart, he never truly conformed. One of his many enemies admitted that Browne never really recanted or altered his opinions. In the end he died tragically and sadly in 1633.

As only to be expected the Anglicans abused him and his followers terribly, Bishop Hall sneering that the Church of England and God matched Separatists with the vilest of humanity. And even the Separatists who followed Browne disowned him for his defection, and scathingly called him an Anglican! He was an apostate! He was no Separatist! Many lies were told about him, and some continue to be repeated.

Yet, in spite of Browne's defection, the seed of Separatism had been sown, and 'Reformation without Tarrying for Any' became the watchword of this third group of Puritans. The Separatists wanted full reform as others did, but they would have neither the Episcopalian nor the Presbyterian system, for they wanted separate, Congregational churches. What is more, they wanted them at once! Wait for the magistrates, said the Puritans. Not so, replied Browne. He denounced those who pleaded that 'the time has not yet come to build the Lord's house; they must tarry for the magistrates and for Parliament to do it... Can the Lord's spiritual government be in no way executed but by the civil sword?' he demanded. This may not seem a remarkable thing to ask nowadays, nevertheless in the late 16th century these and similar views cost men their lives in England! But the Separatists were convinced and committed men and women. They wanted full reform of the church – back to New Testament – and they wanted it at once. Not only that. Nothing and nobody would stop them! Not Elizabeth, not all her bishops, nor all the magistrates in England. This matter of waiting – or rather, not waiting – for the magistrate is so important, we must look at it in more detail.

### ***The role of the magistrate***

The role of the magistrate was crucial in the argument of the Anglicans and the Puritans against the Separatists. We have met it several times already – with Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, among others, in their attacks upon the Anabaptists. The Constantine view was that the magistrate enforces the law in civil matters and also in the church. The Separatists strongly disagreed with this, as did the Anabaptists before them. What does the Bible say about it?

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgement upon themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour (Rom. 13:1-7). Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities (Tit. 3:1). Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and

for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men – as free, yet not using your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as servants of God. Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king (1 Pet. 2:13-17).

A superficial glance at these passages might give the impression that they concern the rule of magistrate in the life of the church, since phrases like ‘ordinance of God’, ‘God’s ministers’ and ‘the Lord’s sake’ occur. But that would be a mistake. These passages are to do with the role of the *civil* magistrate; the ‘governing authorities’ being those who have authority in the civil government. ‘Every soul’, every man, every citizen is to obey and respect such. It is not a matter of church life at all; it is something which concerns every person, ‘every soul’, whether he is a Christian or not. No person is exempt. It is a question of civil obedience. Some Christians of the New Testament age thought they were not obliged to obey pagan governors in their civil rule, so the apostles wrote these words to teach Christians that they must obey them, in common with all men. ‘Every soul’ must obey those in authority. The civil authorities are in place just because God has instituted their office in general, and because he has put them, in particular, into that office. They are ‘appointed by God’. For this reason, resistance to ‘the ordinance of God’ – in this case, the civil ruler – is sinful. The authorities are set up by God to keep stability and order in society, to punish and to reward as the need arises. Civil rulers must be honoured, supported, maintained and obeyed, and this is the duty of all men. Above all, it is especially the duty of believers who must do it ‘for conscience’ sake’, out of a sense of obligation to God. It is ‘the will of God’ that they do so.

But the entire scope of this authority and obedience is clearly civil. I remind you of Calvin’s comments on Romans 13:1-7, already quoted. He rightly said that ‘this whole discourse is concerning civil government’. There is not the slightest hint in this passage – or anywhere else in the New Testament – that magistrates, local government officials or Parliamentary officers have any say in the affairs of the church. Calvin went on to declare that those who try to distort the passage to dominate men’s consciences with a spiritual tyranny are working ‘to no purpose’. I would put it stronger. They are working to a diabolical purpose.

In civil matters, the magistrate does have power, yes! Of course. In that realm, they are God’s ministers, and all men including Christians must obey them. But in the church, no! Never! The civil magistrate has no rule in the church at all. What is more, if the civil magistrate should ever try to enforce a law in the civil realm which conflicts with God’s law in Scripture – which is the only rule in the church – then the principle of Acts 4:19 and 5:29 is paramount for believers. Believers must refuse the civil magistrate

in those circumstances. They must say: ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge... We ought to obey God rather than men’.

All lovers of the Constantine system misunderstand this. Most surprisingly, as we saw earlier, Calvin did, despite what he wrote on the Romans passage. Ridley did when he argued against Hooper’s declaration that ‘the laws of the civil magistrate are not to be admitted into the church’. Even the Presbyterian Westminster Confession, which was drawn up sixty years after the rise of the Separatists, and one hundred and twenty years after the rise of the Anabaptists, could still say that the civil magistrate – *civil*, mark you – has the authority and the duty to preserve order and unity *in the church*, to keep the truth pure, to suppress error and corruptions, and so on. See the Westminster Confession, Chapter XXIII, ‘Of the Civil Magistrate’. What scriptural authority is chosen to support this view? What proof is offered? Where is the scriptural evidence to show that magistrates do govern in the church? Where, in the Bible, are they given the right to destroy error in the church? It is most interesting to see that not one New Testament verse is quoted in this section of the Confession. The fact is, it is impossible to find one. Reader, you may rest assured that if it had been possible one would have been quoted.

In Chapter XX, ‘Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience’, dealing with ‘the power of the civil magistrate’, Romans 13:3-4 and 1 Timothy 2:2 are quoted, but these are manifestly civil in scope. 2 John 10-11 and Revelation 17:12-17 are quoted but they have nothing to do with the subject in question. Passages such as Ezra 7:23-28 are referred to but these, of course, have not the slightest bearing on New Testament church life. The church is a New Testament phenomenon, and the terms of its rule and order are to be found there. We have already seen Calvin’s misunderstanding over this question, and his mistaken application of the Old Testament to the church. For more on this, see my *Infant Baptism Tested*, and my forthcoming book on the law.

I do not undermine the Old Testament by these statements, but there is a change of economy as between the Old and New Testaments, there is a definite, clear change of covenant, which has a large bearing on biblical interpretation and application. Whenever we interpret Scripture we must bear this in mind, otherwise grievous mistakes will be made. At all events, if any reader continues to think that the Ezra passage does refer to the civil magistrate and his rule in the church, then it follows that he must conclude that the magistrate is duty bound to put to death all who offend in the church or in the State. This is how the passage, at least Ezra 7:25-26, reads:

And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River,

all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgement be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.

You can see how these words can be misused and misapplied to the church with terrifying results. Very often in this account of the battle for the church you have seen it done. It will reappear time and time again in the following pages. For all that, these words do not refer to discipline in the church of Christ, do they? Definitely not. They have no bearing whatsoever on the matter. Yet this kind of interpretation still stands in the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith. Now, does anyone seriously think that it is right for magistrates to put to death people who are in spiritual error? Would any Presbyterian today want a magistrate to execute a Separatist simply because he is a Separatist? Really? It is only fair to record, and I do it gladly, that some Presbyterians have adopted measures to disassociate themselves from their Confession at this point. Even so, the original documents are being published still.

I do not deny that in the Old Testament economy, kings did support truth and suppress error, and so on. But it is an utter travesty to argue that New Testament church discipline is based on any system of the kind. It clearly is not. Unfortunately, many – the vast majority – in the late 16th century thought it was.

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The Separatists had feeble beginnings, but their spiritual influence far outstripped their political power. Their political clout was nil. They never wanted it any in any case. They only desired to be scriptural. Like the New Testament churches, they had no political clout, nor did they seek any. They had no access to the high officials of State; they had no influence at Court. But neither did the churches of the New Testament. They did not bother their heads about the Caesars. They did not court their favours. They looked for no advance for the cause of Christ at the hand of the dictators in Rome. For them there was only one king who counted in the church – King Jesus, ‘the Lord Christ’ (Col. 3:24).

Though small their numbers, though tiny and fragile in their beginning, the feeble origins of the early Separatists belied the importance of their contribution to the advance of reform in the church. Principles like the voluntary nature of church membership, the concept of churches composed only of regenerate men and women, their stress on the independency of churches, and so on, were – and are – vital matters. The Separatists recovered the use of extempore prayer, being determined in their opposition to set, read prayers, regarding them as a limitation upon the

Holy Spirit. The Church of England used a liturgy as part of the leftovers from Popery; Calvin used a liturgy; the English Presbyterians followed him with the Waldegrave Prayer Book. But eventually, even belatedly, the Presbyterians would follow the Separatists and reject set prayer. It would take the Puritans many years to come to appreciate the scriptural nature of the Separatist ways. Although the Puritans had early turned their backs upon the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, nevertheless it was only in 1645 that they would put in place the Directory for worship – a Directory, not a Liturgy. But, even as late as 1661, Richard Baxter, the moderate Presbyterian, was compiling the Savoy Liturgy. Yes, the Separatists made a great contribution to the reform of the church, in many aspects of its life. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to them.

But many, today, have forgotten their Separatist origins. Forgotten or suppressed, which is it? And how does this forgetful – or worse – attitude reveal itself? The early Separatists were fugitives and rebels, treated as the off-scouring of society and the dregs of humanity. They rotted in dungeons; some died there; others were hanged. Who was responsible for it? The Church of England! The State Church, tacitly supported by the Puritans – they persecuted the Separatists. But what do we see these days? Many Separatists fawn on the very establishment which so tormented the saints, their forefathers. Separatism has become respectable, refined and genteel today. Christianity has become ‘sanitised’. Some Separatists, more than a little ashamed of their humble origins, have even developed a fancy for the trappings of the establishment. Moderators of this and that Free Church like to attend State occasions, officiating here, there and everywhere dressed in all their finery, even alongside Papists.

It is nothing new. In Victorian times, many Separatist meeting-houses were built to look like massive parish churches, to out-do the Church of England. Today, in many Separatist services there is a kind of liturgy creeping back, little repeated phrases, set forms and rituals, various unwritten laws of the ‘Medes-and-Persian’ variety. Indeed, in a growing number of cases, a formal liturgy is becoming the norm, and it is not merely ‘creeping back’!

Furthermore, Separatists badger Parliament for its intervention to bolster a crumbling Christianity, they beg for grants, they play at being respectable. Away with it! The early Separatists would not recognise it. They would abhor it.

Even more important – all this love of State respectability and popularity comes from Constantine, and has nothing to do with the New Testament. Nothing at all! I realise I shall be accused of stirring up old feuds which were better left to sleep quietly undisturbed. I disagree. Vital

*Thinking the Unthinkable*

scriptural principles are at stake, about which I say more in my *Infant Baptism Tested* and my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

Browne and his friends died in ignominy. The vast majority of them are unknown today, unrecognised by most, and despised by some. But not, I am sure, by God. All honour to their memory. They have their reward.

## *'A Threefold Cord'*

'What shall we do with these men?... But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name'. And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them: 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard'... 'Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word'

Acts 4:16-20,29

*Persecution of Separatists – Barrowe and Greenwood join them – imprisoned and tried – their defence – continued persecution – Barrowe and Greenwood publish many books – the Ancient church – Barrowe and Greenwood hanged – meanwhile Penry converted – preaching in Wales – his appeal for Welsh preachers – imprisoned and tried – released – into Scotland – returns to London – now a Separatist – arrested – hanged – the seeming end of Separatism*

In the early 1580s, after twenty-five years on the throne, Elizabeth still dominated the Church of England. She was not its Supreme Governor in name only! Insisting on uniformity at every turn, she detested the Puritans, while hating the Anabaptists along with the new-fangled Separatists who were now beginning to form churches. The authorities had clamped down upon the Puritans, largely beating them into a grudging and sullen submission by this time, although the measures against them remained in force. Archbishop Whitgift compelled every minister of the State Church to subscribe to the Royal Supremacy in all matters, to pledge unqualified assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles, and to use only the *Book of Common Prayer* in worship. In 1584, a list of twenty-four questions on disputed points was presented to every Church of England minister, to be answered on oath. In addition, to put a stop to all opposition, printing was forbidden unless licensed by the Star Chamber. But, although the Puritans were emasculated, the Separatists proved more difficult to browbeat. The fact is, though worship outside the State system was entirely illegal, an increasing number were daring to do it. Responsibility for this could not be laid at Whitgift's door, for he was certainly zealous in the prosecution of his vigorous campaign, and the prisons rapidly filled with victims of all sorts. Some paid with their lives. Nevertheless, the rebels remained defiant. In such a time, the world came to hear of Henry Barrowe, John Greenwood and John Penry.

Barrowe, a Norfolk man who was well-connected by birth, graduated at Cambridge about the year 1570 to become a lawyer. At that time, he was a drunken, debauched young man, a rank unbeliever. One day, however, when passing a London church, he caught sound of the preacher very loud in his discourse. His companion showed no interest in going in to 'hear a man talk', as he put it, but Barrowe did, and was converted. By 1586, he belonged to a secret Separatist group in London, about a hundred strong, which was meeting in various places like houses along the river, Deptford Woods or the Gravel Pits at Islington. It is probable that the group had developed out of the secret church of 1567-70 where Richard Fitz was pastor, although this company did not actually become a church until 1592. One John Greenwood was another member.

Greenwood graduated at Cambridge about the year 1580, and was much influenced by the radical Puritan teaching there, the memory of Cartwright and Browne remaining very much alive. He became an Anglican minister, then a zealous Puritan chaplain in Essex, but remained deeply affected by the teaching of Browne. Moving to London, he associated with the Separatists, where he fell in with Barrowe.

The secret company of Separatists used to gather all day each Lord's day for prayer and exposition of Scripture, starting at five in the morning. Any brother was at liberty to preach or pray since the group rejected all Anglican notions of worship. There was a precious sense of charity among the members, especially when relieving the needs of any who were arrested and sent to prison. When in prison himself and looking back in fond remembrance of those times, Barrowe said:

So sweet is the harmony of God's graces unto me in the congregation and the conversation of the saints at all times, as I think myself a sparrow on the house-top when I am exiled from them.

Whitgift's spies were everywhere. Greenwood was seized reading the Scriptures in a house on the 7th of October, 1586, and thrown into the Clink. On hearing the grievous news, Barrowe did not try to run away and hide. Quite the opposite – he actually rode to the Clink to visit his friend, but on the way he happened to discuss the New Testament teaching about the office of a bishop with a fellow-traveller, who then betrayed him to the authorities. When Barrowe arrived at the prison, they were waiting for him. He was allowed in, but not allowed out! After his arrest, the officials quickly sought the warrants necessary to legalise their unlawful actions.

In his several trials, Barrowe did not always conduct his defence wisely, using somewhat rough language on occasion. But, it must be remembered, the times were brutal. He may have used stern words; his enemies took sterner measures. Generally, in their trials, the Separatists defined their position with clarity and simplicity, conducting themselves

with humility against the jeers of the tyrannical Star Chamber. But Barrowe was blunt – in the extreme, some would say – but who can cast the first stone? Addressing Whitgift face to face, he dared to call him a ‘beast’ and a ‘monster’. It was true enough, but he probably paid for his penetrating words – with his life. The truth is he was not out to save his skin. It was the thought of the terrible sufferings that men and women were enduring – just because they wanted to worship God according to the New Testament – which always stirred him to the depths. Rightly, he would not stand on genteel ceremony with men who were responsible for the crushing of his brothers and sisters. He could write, in a moving appeal born of ‘tortured helplessness’ as he put it, that ‘these enemies of God detain in their hands within the prisons about London, about three score and twelve persons, men, women, young and old, lying in cold, in hunger, in dungeons and in irons’. He had no time or wish to bandy fine words with the ‘enemies of God’. If seventy-two Separatist prisoners were locked away in London, it can only be wondered how many of them languished in gaols in the rest of the country.

The main accusations against Barrowe were that he had dared to say that the parish system of the Church of England, in which no distinction is made between believers and unbelievers, means that such assemblies are not true churches; that no prince can make laws for the church other than Christ allows in his word; that the worship of the Church of England is idolatrous; that its ministry is antichristian; that the Church must reform immediately, without waiting for the prince; and that any transgressor is to be excommunicated, including the queen herself if necessary – there must be no respect of persons. Greenwood, in his trial, declared that Christ is the only head of his church and his laws cannot be altered by any man. Statements like these put both men on a direct road to the gallows.

Barrowe and Greenwood maintained that the only right and proper course for those who believe that the State Church is unscriptural is to separate from it. It is wrong of men, and dishonourable of them, to continue in a system which they do not believe in, and to accept payment from that system and to teach its doctrines and practices. These statements, of course, made uncomfortable reading for a great many, especially the Puritans who were guilty of the very things Barrowe and Greenwood denounced. The Puritans did continue in the State Church and were paid for it, even though they knew the Church was corrupt.

These were serious assertions. They are relevant today. It is always wrong and dishonourable for men to be part of a corrupt church system which they do not believe in, and to be maintained by that system for teaching and upholding practices and doctrines they know to be questionable or even false. But it is done! And not only in the State

Church. Whenever men stifle conscience and act against it in order to keep their position, *and for whatever reason*, it is wrong. Doing a little evil to accomplish much good is not a Christian principle (Rom. 3:8).

The laws which had been framed against the Papists were now invoked with vigour against the Separatists. Because Barrowe and Greenwood refused to conform to the Church of England and attend ‘some Church, Chapel, or usual place of Common Prayer’, they were confined in the Fleet, the torture chambers of which were the most terrible in London. From their dungeon, they sent the queen a ‘lamentable petition’ on the 13th of March, 1588, on behalf of the miserable prisoners. Some were in cold and foul cells, others bound hand and foot ‘with bolts and fetters of iron’, they said. One man had died of gaol fever in prison, aged sixty-six. Another had been dragged from his wife and eight children, and subsequently died in prison. Two aged widows died of gaol disease. The offence common to all? They had listened to Greenwood preaching.

Reader, would you be prepared to suffer in order that you could worship in a church where you did not have to use set prayers? What price would you pay so that you could be in a church which was composed only of the regenerate? Are you willing to put yourself out in order to meet with a church to hear scriptural preaching from powerful ministers? Do you value these things – enough to pay a high price for them?

Barrowe and Greenwood did not give way under their torments. What an understatement! Nor did they gripe. Taking the fight for the recovery of the New Testament church to their enemies, during their time in prison they published a massive amount of literature. How they did it is almost too much to grasp. Think of their courage. A sentence of death hung over those engaged in this kind of work, by reason of the Star Chamber Decree. Furthermore, how could they see to write in the pitch-black darkness? And where did they get writing materials? There was no peace and quiet in the crowded, foul dungeons, no books to consult. How did they smuggle their works out of prison? But write they did. And how!

Some of the titles and subjects of their books make interesting reading in themselves: *A Brief Summary of the Causes of our Separation*; *A True Description of the Visible Congregation of the Saints* (the Separatists mistakenly continued to use the idea of ‘visible’ churches – see my *Infant Baptism Tested*); a treatise against read prayers; a treatise against the criticism which linked the Separatists to the Donatists, members of a protest movement in the 4th-century churches of North Africa; *A Summary of Certain Conferences in the Fleet*; a volume calling upon the queen to root out apostate ministers; *A Brief Discovery of the False Church*. This last-mentioned volume was not as brief as all that, since it was nearly four

hundred pages long. And three thousand copies were printed! This list on its own shows that Barrowe and Greenwood were men of the highest calibre.

During 1589-90, forty-two Anglican ministers were appointed to confer with the Separatist prisoners. The preachers chosen by the authorities for this task were mainly Episcopalian Puritans. In truth, the conferences were a sham, since their real purpose was to discover the whereabouts of the secret meetings. But the underhand scheme failed utterly!

Barrowe did not buckle in the face of stern opposition, but continued his resolute fight to get the church back to the New Testament. He alleged that it is the immediate duty of the godly to separate from a corrupt church – in this case the Church of England; that parishes are no true church; that without proper spiritual discipline there can be no church, no ministry and no Lord's supper; that the Scriptures are the sole and complete guide and rule in the church; that no man can alter the least part of the Bible; that a particular church is a company of faithful and holy people gathered in the name of Christ, governed by his laws and officers. He had a high – a biblical – view of the church. He roundly declared:

Most joyful, excellent, and glorious things are everywhere in the Scriptures spoken of this church. It is called the city, house, temple, and mountain of the eternal God, the chosen generation, the holy nation, the peculiar people, the vineyard, the garden enclosed... the heritage, the kingdom of Christ, yea... his love, his spouse, his queen, and his body, the joy of the whole earth. To this society is the covenant and all the promises made of peace, of love, and of salvation, and the presence of God, of his graces, of his power and of his protection.

Barrowe opposed Presbyterianism, holding to the same church officers as Browne had done a few years before him. Nevertheless, he was somewhat confused as to the actual exercise of power in a local church. Sometimes it seems he felt the officers were the practical authority; at other times he seemed to come to a Congregational view, where the members ruled the church through the church meeting. This question of the rule of a church would prove a thorny issue among the Separatists within a few years. Barrowe believed that only the pastor could administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, consequently if the pastor was in prison the church would have to go for months without the supper. The pastor must be supported financially, he claimed, but only by the monetary gifts of the believers. While it is not certain, it is possible that he was beginning to question the practice of the baptism of infants. Should it be for believers only? There is some evidence that he was thinking along these lines.

Barrowe was allowed to rot in the Fleet until 1593, 'kept by the prelates in most miserable and strict imprisonment'. He pitifully pleaded for the

release of ‘our poor worn bodies out of this miserable gaol’, but it brought little response. The less fiery Greenwood was released for a little while in 1592. Yet, despite all the hostility they met with, the members of the London group even now did not ‘play safe’. They formed themselves into a church in 1592, at the very height of their troubles, with one Francis Johnson as pastor. It became known as the Ancient church.

Barrowe and Greenwood were finally charged and sentenced to death under one of Elizabeth’s statutes against the publishing of unauthorised books. On several occasions they were about to be executed but were reprieved at the last minute, once with the ropes actually tied around their necks. What harrowing experiences! But eventually, on the 6th of April, 1593, the abominable sentence was carried out, and the two Separatists were hanged at Tyburn. It is reported that just after their death the queen asked a learned adviser what he thought of the two men. ‘If they had lived, they would have been two as worthy instruments for the church of God as have been raised up in this age’, he replied. She asked another what end they made. ‘A very godly end, and prayed for your Majesty and the State’, she was told.

Meanwhile what of the third element of the threefold-cord, John Penry? He too was executed, hanged on the 29th of May, 1593.

Penry was born in 1559 in the mountains of Wales. He went to Cambridge and thence to Oxford, where Puritan influence was instrumental in converting him from his zealous Romanism. At one time, he was so eager a Papist he would break out of his rooms to go to midnight Mass. After his conversion, greatly sensing the joy of his salvation, Penry grieved over the state of the thousands of his fellow-Welshmen who never heard of Christ, but were given up to idolatry, swearing, adultery, theft and superstition. He was appalled that the Anglican priests were ignorant, drunken and debauched. He knew that the people of Wales were practically destitute of preaching, the bishops being too much taken up with the suppression of Puritans and Separatists in England to bother about the spiritual welfare of the Principality.

Penry did what he could to take the gospel to his home-land, single-handed. He travelled widely throughout Wales, preaching in the open air, without official position or recognition. It was reported of him that he was ‘an edifying preacher and a good man... esteemed by many... with more than ordinary learning in him’. He was known as a most gifted minister, godly, full of love and compassion for souls, learned and sympathetic, devoted to the service of the gospel. He was a very effective preacher. Sinners were converted and saints were edified under his ministry, not only in Wales but in England and Scotland, too.

Naturally, this sort of preaching aroused a decadent, drunken and negligent clergy, who fought back in anger. Their jealousy expressed itself in a bitter hatred of him, whereupon he appealed to the queen and Parliament in a treatise he published in 1587. This in itself was illegal, and made him a marked man. In his book, he pleaded that preaching might be set up in Wales, ‘that some ordering might be taken for the preaching of the gospel among the people’. At this stage, he was a loyal Episcopalian and submissive to the queen, clearly holding to the concept of a State Church, to be ruled and funded by Parliament. He was no Separatist, but a decided and faithful son of the established Church. He even dedicated the work to ‘my fathers and brethren of the Church of England’. All he asked was that Welsh preachers should be sent to preach Christ to the Welsh in their own language. Non-resident ministers and those who merely read the Homilies should be got rid of. The crying, desperate need was for living preachers! Living in more senses than one! As for money to support them, he declared that:

They whose hearts the Lord has touched would thresh to get their living rather than the people should want preaching. Our gentlemen and people, if they knew the good that ensues from preaching, would be soon brought to contribute.

But this kind of publication was against the law. It was a violation of the Star Chamber Decree. For this offence, Penry was roughly handled, thrown into prison for a month and then tried. The charge brought against him was that he said that ministers who never preach are no true ministers. He did not draw back. ‘I thank God that I ever knew such a heresy, as I will, by the grace of God, sooner leave my life than leave it [that is, the heresy]’, he declared. Whitgift retorted that he would make him recant. ‘Never, God willing, so long as I live’, came the staunch reply. He would prove the worth of his words.

Yet, amazingly, he was released, but continued to face persecution. Even now, he would not take the easy way out, but showed immense courage and devotion to Christ. He wrote that he could not, he would not, give up the fight. Rather, he said:

If I perish, I perish. If I might live upon this earth the days of Methuselah twice told, and that in no less comfort than Peter, James and John were in the Mount; and after this life might be sure of the kingdom of heaven; yet to gain all this, I dare not go from the former testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ. If my blood were an ocean sea, and every drop thereof were a life to me, I would give them all by the help of the Lord for the maintenance of the same my confession.

He went to Scotland where he was well-received on account of his Puritan principles and he was allowed to preach freely. In September, 1592,

Penry's thoughts once again turned home-wards to Wales, and he returned to London in order to petition the queen that he might be allowed to preach in his own land. This was a highly dangerous move. Whitgift had a warrant out for his arrest, and Elizabeth had written personally to James of Scotland to have Penry apprehended. To add to the risk, Penry now showed that his continued study of the New Testament had brought him to the Separatist position. He had joined the newly-formed London church, the Ancient church, where he fell in with Barrowe and Greenwood, men whom he called 'my dear brethren'. This was a step fraught with danger. Nevertheless, he did not flinch. He was appointed to preach in the church, but was recognised by the vicar of Stepney, betrayed to the authorities and imprisoned.

During his trial, he heard that his friends, Barrowe and Greenwood, had been hanged and he knew that he now had no hope of escape. He made one final pathetic appeal in which he stated: 'I am a poor young man, born and bred in the mountains of Wales. I am the first, since the last springing up of the gospel in this latter age, that laboured to have the blessed seed thereof sown in these barren mountains... If my death can procure any quietness unto the church of God, and unto the State of my Prince, and his kingdom wherein I was born, glad I am that I had a life to bestow in this service'.

On the day his friends were executed, Penry wrote to his wife, whom he had married less than five years before. When we recall that it was an age when there was nothing like Social Security, Widow's or Child Benefit to fall back on, and she had four little girls to bring up on her own, his words are most moving. He faced death squarely. He addressed his letter:

To my beloved wife, Hellenor Penry, partaker with me in this life of the sufferings of the gospel of the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, and resting with me in undoubted hope of that glory which shall be revealed... So dear a sister and so loving a wife in the Lord... I know, my good Helen, that the burden which I lay upon thee of four infants, whereof the eldest is not yet four years old, will not seem in any way burdensome unto thee. Yea, thou shall find that our God will be a father to the fatherless, and a stay unto the widow... I am ready, pray for me. The Lord comfort thee, good Helen, and strengthen thee. My God will provide. My love be with thee now and ever in Jesus Christ... In great haste, with many tears, and yet in great spiritual comfort of my soul, your husband for a season, and your brother for evermore.

Four days later, he wrote to his four 'dear and tenderly beloved daughters, to be read when they come to years of discretion and understanding... I have left you four Bibles', he said, 'being the sole and only patrimony and dowry that I have for you'. Since he had commenced the letter wishing them 'deliverance, comfort, safety and sure hope', and we know that the eldest was called Deliverance, perhaps we are here given all four names.

Last of all he wrote to the church, ‘the distressed and faithful congregation of Christ in London’. ‘Seeing banishment, with loss of goods, is likely to betide you all, prepare yourselves for this hard entreaty’, he told them. He advised them to leave England, and in so doing remember to cleave together. ‘Be all of you assured that he, who is your God in England, will be your God in any other land under the whole heaven; for the earth and the fullness thereof are his, and blessed are they that for his cause are bereaved of any part of the same’. He pleaded with the church to take into exile his ‘poor and desolate widow’ along with his ‘fatherless and friendless orphans’. ‘The Lord, my brethren and sisters, hath not forgotten to be gracious unto Zion. You shall yet find days of peace and rest if you continue faithful’.

As John Penry sat at his mid-day meal on the 29th of May, 1593, he was informed that he had but four hours to live. That same afternoon, forbidden to utter any last words, he was hanged in secret at St Thomas-a-Watering, Southwark, on the baseless charge of treason. He was little more than thirty years old.

Reader, any words of mine must be superfluous, an insult to the memory of such godly men as these three. I leave you to ponder their testimony. Who can be unmoved?

It is appropriate to quote the words of Paul, commenting on his own sufferings for Christ. ‘But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear... I am appointed for the defence of the gospel. What then... Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice’ (Phil. 1:12-18).

May the re-telling of the sufferings of Barrowe, Greenwood and Penry produce a similar furtherance of the gospel in our day.

\* \* \*

In 1593, Elizabeth and her bishops seemed all-conquering. They had defeated the Puritans in general, and the Presbyterians in particular, cowing them into an unwilling submission. With the execution of Barrowe, Greenwood and Penry, the Separatists, too, were at a very low ebb. It is true that Sir Walter Raleigh reported that there were nearly thirty thousand of them at the time, but this was a wild exaggeration. Probably there were no more than five or six hundred. The stark fact is, their leaders had been

*'A Threefold Cord'*

hanged or had died in dungeons, their surviving pastors, teachers and most able members were in prison. As one bitter critic of the Separatists put it, it appeared that ‘they were at the most, a very small number of very silly and base people, here and there in corners dispersed, now, thanks be to God, by the good remedies that have been used, suppressed and worn out; so as there is scarce any news of them’.

Separatism was about to die, even in its infancy. Or was it?

## *The Weapon of Humour*

*Penry probably Marprelate – the tracts – their humour – hated by the authorities – the purpose of the tracts – their success – Penry hanged*

And now we come to the strangest skirmish of all in the battle for the reformation of the church. Enter one Martin Marprelate, Gentleman, a character of fiction in a sense, but one whose works or rather, whose writings, were real enough. Marprelate? A name conjured up from the two words *mar* and *prelate*. *Mar*, to ruin, to impair the perfection of, to spoil, to disfigure. *Prelate*, a high ecclesiastical dignitary, such as a bishop. Hence, Marprelate, one who spoils, disfigures or impairs the perfection of bishops and other Church bigwigs.

Who was Martin Marprelate, Gentleman? Ah, who indeed? Nobody ever found out. The general opinion at the time, the received view, was that he was John Penry. He always denied it. Granted that, it all depends on what question he was asked, does it not? Whether Penry was Martin or not was never proved. In any case, proof did not matter. Suspicion was enough for Archbishop Whitgift's purpose. Somebody had to pay. That somebody was John Penry. He was hanged.

As I explained in the previous chapter, Penry published a petition to the queen and Parliament in March, 1587, in which he appealed for preachers of the gospel to be sent into Wales. For that offence, he was imprisoned and tried under the Star Chamber Decree of 1586. This trial, with its related public notoriety, brought Penry to the attention of certain Puritans, and led to further contact between them and Penry. One of the men involved was John Udall, a Puritan minister at Kingston-on-Thames. He had also published secretly and illegally; in his case, a treatise advocating Presbyterianism. Udall was eventually sentenced to death on suspicion of being Martin, but it was commuted, and he died in prison in 1592. King James of Scotland called him the greatest scholar in Europe. Another member of the group was the witty Job Throckmorton, a learned and eloquent Oxford graduate, a Puritan land-owner, and an MP. Another was the Puritan printer, Robert Waldegrave. It is likely that the four met at Kingston, where they decided upon a plan to prosecute the next stage in the battle to recover New Testament church life. They would do this by the publication of anti-clerical literature. Throckmorton supplied the money to buy a printing press, and by the autumn of 1588 they were ready.

A golden opportunity awaited them. The Anglican Dr Bridges, Dean of Salisbury, had published a book in 1587 entitled *A Defence of The Government of the Church of England* – a ponderous volume of over one thousand four hundred pages! Truly, it was a ridiculous effort. One sentence was actually one hundred and fifty words long! It was incomprehensible. This massive tome was a sitting target, and Martin let fly in November, 1588, with both barrels! He simply could not miss. Thus, out of the blue, an anonymous tract appeared on the market, said to be published ‘at the cost... of Martin Marprelate, Gentleman’. This illegal tract poked fun at Bridges’ volume, mocking the work mercilessly. The upstart publication was a piece of pure genius in satire, clearly showing that Martin possessed a ready wit and the gift of plain speaking. Bridges’ attempted *Defence* of the State Church met with short shrift. Nor did Martin confine his attention to the learned doctor. He mauled the bishops, too, quoting their own sermons and books back at them, accusing them of hypocrisy and worse, giving chapter and verse to support his claims. He deridingly addressed them as ‘brethren bishops, my learned brethren’, while calling himself ‘your brother Martin’.

Meanwhile the secret press moved location, and in December, 1588, another tract appeared. The press moved again, and in February, 1589, a third tract was published. A fourth quickly followed. Martin was no fool, whoever he was; neither was he interested in a joke for a joke’s sake. He did not lampoon the bishops just to get a laugh; he had a serious purpose in hand. He said he was determined that the arguments about the reformation of the church should be more widely known and discussed by the man in the street, not buried in ponderous tomes read only by the few. He set out to make the subject popular, in the right sense. He understood enough to pick out the point at issue between Whitgift and the Puritans, which was ‘whether the... government of the Church of England be a thing so prescribed by the Lord in the New Testament as it is not lawful for any man to alter the same?’

Martin knew that his mockery angered the Anglicans and the Puritans, both Episcopalian and Presbyterian, and that many Puritans objected to his humorous approach. He justified himself by arguing that a jest was lawful in the circumstances, and he made sure that he never profaned the word of God. He replied to his critics by saying:

The Puritans are angry with me, I mean the Puritan preachers. And why? Because I am too open. Because I jest... I jested because I dealt with a worshipful jester, Dr Bridges, whose writings and sermons tend to no other end than to make men laugh... I am plain. I must needs call a spade a spade... There be many that greatly dislike of my doings. I may have my wants, I know. For I am a man, but my course I know to be ordinary and lawful. I saw the cause of Christ’s government, and of the bishops’ anti-Christian dealing to

be hidden. The most part of men could not be gotten to read anything written in the defence of one against the other. I bethought me therefore of a way men might be drawn to do both, perceiving the humours of man in these times... to be given to mirth. I took that course. I might lawfully do it... Jesting is lawful by circumstances even in the greatest matters... I never profaned the word [of God] in any jests... The Lord being the author both of mirth and gravity, is it not lawful in itself for the truth to use either of these ways when the circumstances do make it lawful?

Martin nailed Whitgift along with Aylmer, Bishop of London, whom he accused of being a ‘dumb minister’, one who used profane language, one who did not pay the bills of tradesmen. He further accused him of stealing a piece of cloth, playing bowls on Sundays, and selling the timber from Church estates to line his pocket with the proceeds. Now Aylmer – as a bishop – was known to be severe against any who disagreed with him, handing out heavy fines and imprisonment. For this, Martin was scathing, quoting Aylmer’s own book back at him, written when he – Aylmer – was a Marian exile and sympathetic to reform! In another passage, Martin was caustic over a grovelling sermon preached by the Bishop of Gloucester, the main point of which seemed to be the meaning and distinction attached to the name ‘John’ – ‘John’ being the first name of both Whitgift and Aylmer, of course! Others came in for rough treatment, too. The Bishop of St David’s was a bigamist. There was the notorious scandal over the Bishop of Winchester’s wife... And so it went on. Martin promised that if the bishops would encourage preaching, get rid of popish garments, grant him an amnesty... then he would stop. If not...

The hatred which Martin aroused was immense. Whitgift was incensed; he was livid. He ordered his spies to catch Martin, and they certainly did their best. Throughout 1589, they tried their utmost, hunting high and low. Waldegrave went to France. Penry dodged from place to place. But the output of tracts continued. Two more appeared in July, 1589. Then another. The press was seized, but a replacement press, poorer but useable, produced two more tracts, the last in September, 1589. Thus seven tracts came out in about ten months. Penry, in disguise, had been constantly on the move, in fear of his life. But the tracts kept coming. Not only that, Penry was also publishing works under his own name!

The Marprelate tracts certainly accomplished what their author intended. He ensured that the knowledge of the details of the controversies concerning the reformation of the church did spread far and wide. His stout blows against the stuffy pomposity of the bishops brought a new dimension to the whole question. Martin’s blunt speaking, his sharp and stinging satire, made for bright, racy reading. He was no mealy-mouthed wit, nor did he pull any punches. He named names. He offered an open kind of blackmail which highly amused his public. A bloated bishop would

be warned in one tract that unless he mended his ways further revelations would follow. The tracts were impudent, full of spicy stories and gossipy scandal. Martin was an impudent fellow, and no mistake! The popularity of the tracts was immense. The man's sheer cheek, his daring, brought delight to everybody. Well, almost everybody. Queen Elizabeth and her flunkies read them with much interest; university scholars concealed them under their gowns, studied them and sniggered in secret; high and low pored over their pages. From the Court to the cottage, from the peasant's hovel to the university hall, the bishops found that everybody was ridiculing them. Martin brought to light the scandals of the bishops, their carnality and their hypocrisy. The prelates became a laughing-stock. The abuses and corruptions of the Church of England became the stuff of common gossip.

Then, in 1559, a book was published against the tracts which accused Penry, naming him as Martin. His house was ransacked, and an order was issued for his arrest. The chase was on. He fled to Scotland, where his Puritan sympathies ensured him a warm welcome, since, as already noted, at that time he was no Separatist. Indeed, Martin had attacked Barrowe. All the while, Penry was on the run he continued to preach and to publish yet more works.

As I explained in the previous chapter, Penry eventually came to London to seek permission from the queen that he might return to Wales as a preacher. From a personal point of view it was a most unwise decision, but the spiritual plight of his fellow-countrymen proved too strong for him. The risk he took in coming back to England was immense, for, to cap it all, when he was in London, he showed he had now become a Separatist. He was arrested.

Although it was never proved, it is almost certain that Penry was Martin. Penry certainly played a large part in the whole affair. He denied it but, of course, as I have said, it all depends on the exact question that he was asked!

Whitgift's rage was unbounded. The lustre of the dignity of the bishops had been tarnished, and the bubble of their inflated pride had been pricked by the tracts. But at last he had Martin Marprelate in his grasp, or so he was convinced. Whitgift was full of spite; he was bent on vengeance. There was no escape. Martin Marprelate would write no more.

John Penry was hanged in 1593.

## *The Cambridge Wonder*

An eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures

Acts 18:24

*Cambridge, the 1590s – Perkins – the conforming Puritans give up the fight to reform the Church – they leave it to the Separatists outside the State Church – Perkins' preaching – the place – the theme – the power – his books – the **Golden Chain** – his controversy with Popery – his book on preaching – its importance – his failure to tackle the reform of the Church – Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel – preaching centres – Westminster Chapel*

By the early 1590s, as we have seen, Puritanism had split into two main groups. First, there were the Conformists, those who stayed within the Church of England, grudgingly conforming to its rubric but wanting further reform, mainly of a Presbyterian nature. They hoped that one day they might have a monarch who would give them a State Church established according to their principles, with uniformity enforced by law. The other section of the Puritans were of a very different persuasion. They were the Separatists who, rejecting the Church of England as an apostate church and altogether beyond reform, seceded from it. This was illegal, of course, and carried stern punishment by the State. Eventually, in 1662, all the Puritans with very few exceptions would ‘re-unite’ to become Nonconformists and quit the Church of England, but in the 1590s they were grievously divided, and went their different ways.

The Separatists had a very hard path to tread with years of bitter suffering to come. They would have to endure much disappointment and heartbreak, exile, persecution, homelessness and poverty. But they gladly faced up to this because they were determined to enjoy New Testament church life, and enjoy it at once without waiting for permission from men. In fact, they despised the notion that men have any say in the matter. They would not ‘tarry for any’.

On the other hand, the conforming Puritans by this time had given up all hope that Elizabeth would allow reform in the Church. They became very dispirited as it dawned on them that while Elizabeth was on the throne they would never get what they wanted. It was a bitter pill they were forced to swallow. But swallow it most of them did. The all-dominant Elizabeth was too obstinate for the Conformists in general and for the Presbyterians in particular. They were pulling against a strongly flowing tide. Changing the figure, they had lost the battle almost before it had

begun. They seemed to give up the fight, resign themselves to the fact that the queen, the bishops and Parliament would not allow them to alter the Church system. It has been rightly said:

The tyranny of the bishops, the lessening of the Roman Catholic threat by the defeat of the Armada, the Marprelate tracts, and the threat of banishment to any nonconforming person, all combined to smite a virile Presbyterianism, hip and thigh, and it more than halted ever after. Indeed, one may wonder whether its spirit was ever the same again.

In this cowed spirit, the Presbyterians stayed within the Church of England, buoyed up by the thought that Elizabeth was ageing. Her long and high-handed reign must come to an end some day! Her successor was coming. Who could tell what might happen? Perhaps the approaching king might be more favourable to their cause; he could hardly be worse. In truth, they had reason to nurture a measure of confidence. After all, James was a Scot – and a Presbyterian into the bargain! And this kept a glimmer of hope alive in conforming Puritan hearts as the old century came to a close. But it was to prove a false hope. Once again, bitter disappointment awaited those who wanted reform within the established Church. It was only after many years of sorrow and frustration that the conforming Puritans, like the Separatists before them, would come to see that there was no confidence to be placed in princes. By staying within the State Church in the 1590s, they chose what seemed the easier route. Even so, it was the wrong route. They would learn – and learn the hard way.

Meanwhile, they would accept lie after lie from kings, persist in hope against hope, longing for the reform of a Church which could not be reformed. In the end, some of them would even turn to carnal weapons, taking up politics and the sword to bring in the Church they wanted. But not all of them, for as the years passed, some of the conforming Puritans would give up the useless struggle within the Church, leave it, and throw in their lot with the Separatists and suffer with them. Nonetheless, as I noted in passing, it would be another seventy years before the vast majority of the conforming Puritans as a body, in 1662, would at long last quit the State Church and join the Separatists outside the pale of the Church of England as Nonconformists.

So what did the conforming Puritans do meanwhile? How did they proceed?

On the subject of the reform of the Church, they bided their time, changed tack and waited for a better day. They became those well-known Puritan preachers and writers whose names have come down to us through the centuries. Some of them became Lecturers, some were appointed as private chaplains, others accepted livings somehow free of the rule of a bishop. History has frequently called them *the Puritans*. But we shall see.

These conforming Puritans turned their attention to preaching – a certain kind of preaching, that is – in which they did not refer much, if at all, to the disputes over church matters, but threw all their energy into preaching for practical godliness. So much so, the impression some historians have gained is that the difference between the Anglicans and the conforming Puritans died out or was of very little consequence from the 1590s onwards. This is simply not true. But it has to be recognised that the Presbyterians certainly acted as though it might be true. They gave that impression by the way they dealt so little with the practical reform of the church. Though they were, in their hearts, grieved at the chaotic, unbiblical state of the Church of England – their Church, it has to be said – in practice, they compromised over church order. They largely gave up the fight! They threw in the towel. In this way, a kind of peace reigned within the Church, but it was only illusory. The conflict was merely put off; it was not brought to a verdict. The uneasy truce stumbled on for years, until the final battle was engaged in the early 1660s, and the Puritans were ignominiously defeated.

So far-reaching was this practical abandonment of the implementation of Presbyterianism in England, Robert Baillie would be able to say, in 1643, that ‘as yet a Presbytery to [the English] is conceived to be a strange monster’. It was something they did not know much about, he meant, and what they did know of it, the English did not like. The fact is, England never did have a proper Presbyterian system put in place, because its advocates gave up the struggle against kings and queens who loved Episcopacy. Even at the great Westminster Assembly, called in 1644 when the Puritans temporarily possessed political power, Presbyterianism did not hold sway among the English who composed the overwhelming majority of the delegates. Listen to Baillie again; he complained that ‘a great party in the [Assembly] had no fixed Presbyterian principles’. Of that time, Richard Baxter would declare: ‘Presbytery was not then known in England, except among a few studious scholars, nor well by them’. Thus, it is fair to say, the Presbyterians of the 1590s and onwards largely fell silent on their avowed principles, at least as far as the implementation of them was concerned. Presbyterianism was simply not advocated nor advanced in the Church of England. That is how the above complaints came to be made.

The conforming Puritans, then, devoted themselves to a particular kind of preaching from the 1590s onwards. And they became very powerful in it. Sadly, sinfully, they gave up the conflict over the reform of the church for all practical purposes, but within the context of their preaching they were second-to-none.

William Perkins (1558-1602) was the first and most formative of this long line of mighty preachers. There were others in the 1590s, of course, like Henry Smith who died at the age of thirty-one after only three years ministry in London; and many more came after. Nevertheless, Perkins was reckoned to be the ‘patriarch’ of the Presbyterian preachers – he was ‘associated with the classical [that is, Presbyterian] movement’ – and his ministry at Cambridge had such an immense effect for good, both in his own generation and long after, it is hard to overstate it. His fellow-Puritans, themselves no mean preachers, knew him as ‘Perkins our wonder’. It has been justly claimed that he was ‘the dominant influence in Puritan thought for the forty years after his death’. William Ames, a Puritan preacher of a later generation, was one of his students. He published a book on the conscience in 1639, and in his Remarks to the Reader he said:

I gladly call to mind the time, when being young, I heard worthy Master Perkins so preach in the great assembly of students, that he instructed them soundly in the truth, stirred them up effectually to seek after godliness, made them fit for the kingdom of God; and by his own example showed them, what things they should chiefly intend, that they might promote true religion, in the power of it, unto God’s glory, and others’ salvation. And among other things which he preached profitably, he began at length to teach, How with the tongue of the learned one might speak a word in due season to him that is weary, out of Isaiah 50:4 by untying and explaining diligently, CASES OF CONSCIENCE (as they are called). And the LORD found him so doing a faithful servant. Yet left he many behind him affected with that study; who by their godly sermons (through God’s assistance) made it to run, increase, and be glorified throughout England.

In his youth, Perkins himself had been a student at Cambridge, at which time he was a notorious drunkard and given to reckless profanity. But he was arrested by the Spirit of God and convicted of sin when he overheard a mother scold her child: ‘Hold your tongue, or I’ll give you to drunken Perkins over there’. To hear his name used as a common term of abuse struck him hard, starting him on the road which eventually led him to faith in Christ. After his conversion, he immediately applied himself to study, making such rapid and thorough progress that at the age of twenty-four he became a Fellow of his college, and a Church of England minister. He later became a Puritan Lecturer.

As a preacher, he was mighty in his pulpit work, a man full of compassion for sinners, a man clothed in power by the Holy Spirit. Perkins made the gospel come alive by his preaching, so that those who attended him found ‘plain and wholesome meat’ for their souls. His sermons were noted for their ability to awaken sinners, it being said that he only had to pronounce the word ‘damn’, and it would leave an awful impression upon

his hearers for a long time to come. Besides his college work and his lectureship, he laboured for the salvation of sinners, often in the hardest of places in the town. Places like the prison, where he ministered among the inmates, taking a room there and preaching every Sunday with great success. Also, he would attend public executions in order to climb upon the scaffold to deal with a condemned man about his soul. Even in that horrible place, and at that time, Perkins' prayers and earnest pleas would bring tears of repentance over sin, followed by tears of joy in salvation. It must have been a most remarkable sight to see a Church of England minister – one who was a renowned academic and a college Fellow – kneeling in prayer, with his arms about a condemned wretch just before the hangman did his work. No doubt such scenes would have affected many.

The great theme which Perkins took up in his sermons was the practical Christian life. He was not interested in fine points of academic distinction, nor argument for its own sake. He said he had far more serious work to do. For example, when dealing with the doctrine of original sin, he likened it to a man's house on fire, and declared: 'There is no time then to inquire how, and which way, and whence the fire came, but our duty is with all speed and expedition to use all good means to stay it'. His aim was to be of spiritual benefit to his hearers, subservient to the glory of God.

Though Perkins was a highly intellectual man, his preaching was anything but academic. His great concern was: What is the practical application of doctrine? What is the use of it? But before he got to the use he would establish his doctrine out of Scripture, and only out of Scripture. The practical use was the end-product, but its basis was the doctrine of Scripture. He was most careful to emphasise this order, stipulating that doctrine must be established first, and then the application must follow. But only then! The application to the conscience would then rest, he said, 'upon most certain and sufficient grounds, collected and drawn out of the very word of God'. This was a clear distinction between Perkins and the Papists who depended on sources other than Scripture, sources like tradition, the popes or the Fathers. The Anglicans, too, relied on the Fathers and custom as opposed to the plain words and doctrine of Scripture.

Perkins' chief matter was, *How a Man may know whether he be the Child of God or No?* – and he published a book with that title in 1592. His teaching on the subject over twenty years was all within the framework of Calvinism, 'that I might clear the truth, the Calvinists' doctrine', he declared, in order to answer the question: How may a man be scripturally assured that he is a true child of God? Perkins influenced multitudes by

this kind of preaching, thereby bringing many souls to Christ, and thence into the full assurance of faith and hope.<sup>1</sup>

His greatest book, *The Golden Chain or The Description of Theology, containing the Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation according to God's Word*, was published in 1591. It has gone into several editions down the years. It opened with a chart giving a visible catechism of all the links in the chain of the gospel. At the top of the chart was 'God's Foreknowledge and Decree'. Then the chart split into two – 'The Decree of Election' and 'The Decree of Reprobation', both leading into 'Creation' and 'The Fall'. 'Election', one side of the chart, led on to 'The Love Of God to his Elect', 'Effectual Calling', 'Justification', 'Sanctification', 'Glorification' and 'Life Eternal' with several ramifications on the way. On the other side of the chart 'The Decree of Reprobation' led to 'God's Hatred of the Reprobate', 'No Calling', 'Ignorance', 'Vanity'... 'Damnation' and 'Death Eternal in Hell'. At which stage, 'Life Eternal and Death Eternal', the two lines joined again to reach the ultimate, which is 'God's Glory'. Of the chart, Perkins explained that 'it may be instead of an ocular catechism to them which cannot read: for by pointing of the finger they may sensibly perceive the chief points of religion, and the order of them'.

This was a highly significant statement. It remains a challenge and a stimulus for today's preachers. Perkins was an intellectual, a master of theology, a university Fellow. But above all he was a preacher, and, like his master, Jesus Christ, 'the common people heard him gladly' (Mark 12:37). Now this did not happen automatically or 'by chance'. Perkins made it his great aim! He looked upon it as a main part of his work. He did not stand upon his reputation or learning, but he set out to be as simple as he could, in order that everybody, even those who could not read, might understand his preaching. He would take the most massive doctrines of the gospel and make them plain to the humblest hearer. It was said that in Cambridge 'the scholar could hear no learnedser and the townsman no plainer sermons' than those of William Perkins in the 1590s.

With certain caveats, this is the very preaching we need today.<sup>2</sup> Too often, the people ask for bread, and they get an academic stone. They ask for a living word from God, and they are given a dry, arid lecture on theology. For instance, a lecture on 'Biblical Masculinity', 'Biblical Femininity' or 'Romance in Marriage' instead of gospel sermons, is not

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<sup>1</sup> Since the first edition, I have come to think again about the subject of preparationism, and I am now convinced that the Puritans, and others who have followed them, made big mistakes in this area. Hence my 'with certain caveats'. I will have more to say on this in my forthcoming book on the law.

<sup>2</sup> See my forthcoming book on Sandemanianism.

good enough. Not good enough? It is a wonder the heavens do not fall! In our reaction against the giving of a flippant ‘talk’, we can go to the opposite extreme. Let us look to ourselves. There is precious little real gospel preaching these days. We pay lip service to 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, but we must make sure we do indeed preach ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’. Not enough preachers think of the unconverted.

The obvious needs to be stated. Those who cannot read, or those who cannot easily grasp academic arguments, have an immortal soul as precious as any man’s. And they will be damned in hell just as much as other men, unless they come to faith in Christ. We must remember that sinners do not need to be endowed with a high intelligence in order to become Christians. We are in danger of forgetting it. Too often the preaching these days gives the impression that an academic gift is required. I repeat what I said a moment or two ago – the common people heard our Saviour gladly (Mark 12:37). He chose some of his apostles from among the ‘uneducated and untrained’ (Acts 4:13). Indeed, God calls his elect mainly from the foolish, weak, base and despised – not from the noble, wise and mighty (1 Cor. 1:26-31). These things must weigh heavily with preachers; it is their duty to reach all kinds of sinners with the gospel, and this must govern the way they approach their hearers. There are too many intellectual, highfalutin, academic lectures, couched in evangelical or even Calvinistic jargon, handed down these days. There is not enough simple, plain preaching. We do not want slabs of theology culled from books. We want the living gospel put to us in terms we can understand. We want to see Jesus (John 12:21), and see him ‘clearly portrayed among’ us (Gal. 3:1). If the youngest responsible person and the worst-educated hearer in the congregation can understand the preacher, the rest can! Of course, only the Spirit of God can bring spiritual understanding (1 Cor. 2:12-14), but it is the preacher’s job to speak so that the people can take in what he says. Satan will blind men’s minds without the preacher’s help! What some people might call ‘deep’ would be better labelled as ‘complicated’, ‘muddled’ or ‘confused’. Perkins certainly walked in Paul’s steps, for he did not use ‘excellence of speech or of wisdom’ (1 Cor. 2:1) in his discourses. He could have done it – he possessed sufficient academic ability, needless to say – but his sermons were deliberately void of showy learning.

This does not mean that Perkins was not a real preacher. Far from it! Indeed, it proves that he *was* a preacher. ‘An excellent gift he had to define properly, divide exactly, dispute subtly, answer directly, speak pithily, and write judicially’. It is clear that he was a very simple preacher, speaking clearly and directly to all his hearers. He was most apt in his illustrations, having ‘an excellent gift in similitudes’. He did not make the common

mistake of thinking his sermons were deep because they were unclear. He was, and is for us, a model for all preachers.

*The Chain* was recognised in its day as a masterpiece of Calvinism; indeed, it has been claimed that ‘his order could not be bettered for an outline of his theology’. What the actual preaching must have been like can only be imagined. Try to picture the great assembly of students listening to his lectures – in his case more nearly sermons (how things have been reversed today!) – many being saved under his teaching. Think of his preaching in the town of Cambridge, in the prison and on the scaffold, preaching which was remarkable for the numbers who were awoken under it.

Perkins did not avoid controversy with the Papists. He was clear on the antichristian nature of Popery. ‘It is a thing most evident that the present religion of the Church of Rome is an enemy to the grace of God’, he said. Why? Because ‘it exalts the liberty of man’s will, and [lowers] the grace of God’, he declared. Popery belittles the Fall and its effect on the natural man. It glorifies the power of man, pretending that he is able to convert himself, ascribing the cause of God’s election to good foreseen in the sinner and not simply to God’s free choice. It asserts that Christ died for all men, and that God’s decree is uncertain of fulfilment. It does not ascribe salvation entirely to the free and sovereign grace of God. This, said Perkins, is why Popery is an enemy to the gospel.

Those who assert those very doctrines in evangelical pulpits today ought to heed Perkins’ words. And such doctrines are preached by evangelicals – not only by Papists – in the early 21st century.

Perkins, prolific in his writings, published many books and commentaries, and both by them and through his preaching he had a tremendous influence in his generation and long after. He was only a man, to state the obvious, and some of his words give critics the impression that he tended to legalism.<sup>3</sup> For all that, by whatever standard he is judged, it is not difficult to see why, as noted above, he was known by his fellow-Puritans as ‘Perkins our wonder’.

He was one of the first to publish a book on the subject of preaching itself, calling it *The Art of Prophesying*. He said that there are four main principles involved in real preaching, four marks by which it may be tested. They are:

1. The text must be from the Bible and it must be read distinctly.
2. The preacher must give the sense and meaning of the passage, and he must do that by expounding it and establishing its sense by other Scriptures.

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<sup>3</sup> See the first note in this chapter. With the passing of a few years, and more study, I have grown more sympathetic to this criticism.

3. Some profitable points must be collected from the passage as understood in its proper, natural sense.
4. This must lead to an application of the doctrines to the practical use of the hearers, and it must all be done in plain and simple language.

This is a most important analysis; it shows the typical Puritan way of preaching, and is clearly scriptural. How this kind of preaching is sorely needed today! The preacher must not start with a subject, a topic, a credal statement, or a doctrine, even though this happens. Sermons have been based on a hymn, the characters which make up a word like ‘Christmas’, the letters of a person’s name, and so on. And when this occurs it is grievous indeed. No! The preacher must start with Scripture, and his whole sermon must come directly from the passage before him. He does not stand in the pulpit to give out his own ideas or ‘insights’ on Scripture. Rather, he must explain, enforce and apply the Scripture itself, in its very words, its natural and proper sense. Just to read a text and then ignore it, or force his own ideas upon it, is totally wrong. For a preacher to start with a sermon, and then look for a text, is a travesty. Scripture is not a peg to hang a man’s thoughts on!

In 2 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul commanded us to ‘preach the word’. Yes, we must *preach* the word, and it must be *the word* which we preach. It is imperative that preachers preach the word itself; they are not to preach *on* the word, or *about* the word, or *around* the word, or *in praise of* the word. The ‘therefore’ in the first verse links it with the closing verses in the previous chapter to show the unbreakable connection which exists between Scripture and preaching. The preacher’s duty is to preach the word, all of it (Acts 20:27). See also the first part of 1 Peter 4:11.

Furthermore, the preaching of the word is not to be separated from doctrine. In 2 Timothy 4:2, the apostle explained himself and told us what is involved in preaching; it is to ‘convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching’. It is this last point which I now emphasise. The preaching of the word must be ‘with teaching’ or doctrine. Actually, it is probably better to translate it, ‘preach the word... *in* or *by* teaching or doctrine’; that is, by means of teaching, not merely *with* teaching. Putting it another way, doctrine is to be the medium of preaching, the way preaching the word comes to men. Doctrine is not to be treated just as a pleasant accompaniment to preaching, like mint sauce with lamb. No! Doctrine is the way in which the preacher actually preaches the word. He must, as Perkins said, establish his doctrine before he makes application. I do not mean to imply that no pointed question or exhortation can be given early in the sermon – far from it – for application must come all through the sermon. If a preacher waits until the end to apply the word, his hearers will be able to prepare themselves to resist; therefore he must make application

before they are ready for it!<sup>4</sup> But this application always has to flow out of the doctrine of the word. If it does not do that then it does not rest on a solid basis. Even if the preacher says the right thing and his hearers obey him, their obedience will rest on his say-so – a very poor basis; it must rest entirely on God's word. Calvin was very strong in his comments on the Timothy passage. He said:

Reproofs... vanish into smoke, if they do not rest on doctrine. Both exhortations and reproofs are merely aids to doctrine, and, therefore, have little weight without it. We see instances of this in those who have merely a large measure of zeal and bitterness, and are not furnished with solid doctrine. Such men toil very hard, utter loud cries, make a great noise, and all to no purpose, because they build without a foundation... In short, Paul means that reproofs are founded on doctrine, in order that they may not be justly despised as frivolous.

What a revolution it would be if all pulpits were occupied by men of the stamp of Calvin and Perkins, men who were preaching in this way. Who can tell what the effect would be?

You can see what a debt we owe to Puritans like William Perkins, and why he was rightly known as the patriarch of Puritan preachers. In that role, he was second-to-none in his generation and long after. How much he crammed into his short life – by preaching and publishing during his thirties – for he died when he was only forty-four. But he had listened to his own discourses and tasted for himself the gospel which he preached, so that he knew ‘the right way of dying’. He could say that ‘the love of God is like a sea, into which when a man is cast, he neither feels bottom, nor sees bank... God of his great and endless mercy has brought us to Christ, as to a sure anchor-hold’.

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But something – in addition to the footnotes I have added – was amiss. I have chosen Perkins as the best example to illustrate the power of the conforming Puritan preachers at the end of Elizabeth's reign and on into the next century. Imagine it – there were many preachers of his stamp and they did a tremendous amount of good by their sermons. But, as Lloyd-Jones put it:

The attempt to turn the whole of the Church of England into a Presbyterian Church... had failed. They therefore began to concentrate on pastoral teaching and pastoral theology... The big thing, the original idea, seemed impossible, so they turned in this direction, hoping that ultimately times might change and true reform of the Church might be possible. This pastoral, indeed pietistic,

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<sup>4</sup> See my forthcoming book on Sandemanianism.

element, had been there always, but, hitherto, subsidiary to the desire for true reform of the Church. Indeed, the underlying argument is that it is only a truly reformed church that guarantees the possibility of that full flowering of the truly religious type of life.

This last sentence makes a vital point. And that is why I say that, excellent though the Puritan preachers were, something was amiss. The reform of the Church of England was an essential at the end of the 16th century. It was not simply – or merely – a question of a few arid and petty details of order. No! A truly reformed church is an absolute essential for the full and proper development of spiritual life; that is the point. It was precisely here that the Puritan preachers fell short.

The question which needs to be asked is: What of the battle for church life at that time? Perkins favoured, wanted, Presbyterianism but he did not make an issue of it. He did not advocate it in his public discourses. As I explained at the beginning of the chapter, and in words from Lloyd-Jones just quoted, this seems to be the method which the Presbyterians adopted in the 1590s and onwards. They put the battle for church reform on ‘hold’ and devoted their time and efforts to the promotion of practical godliness by their preaching. Perhaps this came out of the Puritan inventions to improve preaching – I hinted as much when writing about the Lecturers, it will be recalled. On the counts of preaching, writing, and dealing with the conscience, and so on, Perkins and his like were of the highest calibre.

But... let us face the question fairly. Were they right to let the battle for the church slide into limbo? Were they right to compromise on church order? Were they right to obey Queen Elizabeth, and by so doing disobey the Lord Christ? Of course not! Was a thoroughly reformed church life not a major part of true Puritanism? Most definitely it was. After all, the church is the only body which Christ founded. Hence Perkins is to be criticised because he did not deal much, if at all, with the pattern and order of a church in his preaching. He was wrong in this regard. But he was not the last to take that line on the matter. I give just one recent example. Concerning church government: ‘The subject entered very little into his ministry and never formed the substance of Sunday sermons... His views on baptism almost never appeared in his public ministry’. Those words were written, not about William Perkins, but about Martyn Lloyd-Jones. It is that last-quoted statement which stands out in contrast to the New Testament. It is impossible to read the Acts without seeing that the apostles did the opposite – they almost invariably introduced baptism into their public ministry. Spurgeon certainly walked in their footsteps. He often closed a sermon by quoting: ‘He that believes and is baptised shall be saved’ (Mark 16:16).

Now the preaching of the gospel ought not to be divorced from church life and order, and this includes baptism (see Matt. 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15-16). As noted above, I raised this point in ‘Geneva’ and ‘The Lost Cause’, saying we would return to this connection between preaching and the church. We do so now. We know that Paul, by the preaching of the gospel, planted churches. He must, therefore, have dealt with the doctrine, order and practice of the church in his discourses. The same goes for others who saw churches formed and built up by their ministry. Likewise, it is essential for us to deal with the pattern and rule of the church in our preaching, including its day-to-day aspects. Not in every sermon, of course, I hasten to add!

I am very anxious not to be misunderstood at this point. I am most definitely *not* arguing for a diet of so-called preaching which amounts to nothing more than a pedantic harping on about the minute details of church order. No! For instance, I deplore the case where six consecutive Sunday sermons were devoted to the subject of the *plurality* of elders. While I wholeheartedly agree with the principle of the plurality of elders, on hearing of these particular sermons I felt bound to ask how many sinners were converted under the preaching. I doubt the heavenly corridors were excessively disturbed by it (Luke 15:7). Reader, please do not think I regard it as something to be laughed at. It is not funny. I deplore this emphasis upon points of organisation at the expense of the preaching of the gospel. There is a time and a place for looking at the structure of the church – though I seriously doubt the need for *six* weeks on the point in question. But at the time when the gospel should be preached to sinners? Never! The people want bread, not a stone. They want the kernel, not the shell. Sinners need saving. Saints need to be edified.

I hope I am making myself clear. I am not appealing for arid lectures on church organisation – and a diet of *that* in place of preaching. I do not complain that Perkins did not fill up his time by an endless exploration of church structure. What I do say is, he and many other conforming Puritans at the time were Presbyterian in outlook, but they could not get what they wanted in the State Church. Therefore, they kept quiet about it and compromised. They did not take the costly steps the Separatists did, that they might obtain what they believed to be right. Many might praise Perkins and others for their ‘wise’ decision. With respect, I think they were mistaken. Their action – or lack of it – had severe repercussions, some of which will become only too apparent as we go on.

And as for the issue of preaching and church life, I say that preaching in the New Testament was nearly always in the context of church life (Matt.

28:19-20; Acts 2:37-47).<sup>5</sup> There were exceptions of course, Acts 8:26-40 for one. But even here, Philip brought in baptism. And such instances, of preaching with no church context, were the exception.

What is more, when I speak about the practice of the church, I also include its spiritual life and vigour, not merely its organisation. The entire business of church experience and order must be dealt with. I say it is wrong not to face up to, or neglect, or to suppress the practical difficulties of church conduct. Preaching which is independent of church life, or where churches are not formed as a result, or at least aimed for, was virtually unknown in the days of the New Testament. Sadly, however, that kind of preaching is a growing phenomenon of our time. A gap is appearing between preaching and church life. This will have very serious consequences. For one thing, if sinners are converted, what is their immediate need? It is to belong to a church which is as close as possible to the order and pattern of the New Testament. This single fact is enough to confirm what I am trying to say.<sup>6</sup>

One of the faults, the many faults, of some modern methods of evangelism is their failure to take proper account of the New Testament accent upon the church. And there are other ways in which preaching and church life can be separated. When speaking of the critics of Calvin, I mentioned the danger that we might look on preaching as a kind of intellectual hobby or sport, an occupation for spectators. He answered his critics, and rightly distinguished between preaching in isolation and preaching in a pastoral way. Reader, I put it to you that special meetings simply for preaching, where the preaching is seemingly *an end in itself*, have mushroomed down the years. I do not wish to be pedantic, and I am choosing my words with care. I ask: Is there any example of this kind of service in the early church? Did preachers travel from one set of special preaching meetings to another? Were distinct preaching services held just for ministers? Even Paul's unique meeting with the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20:17-38) was very much concerned with the church life at Ephesus, if not entirely so. Is there any risk that we shall become sermon connoisseurs, like some men are tea tasters or others are pigeon fanciers? Watching an expert cook a meal has become a very popular past-time, judging by programmes on television. Is there any chance that Christians can get to enjoy watching a preaching expert demonstrate his talents as he preaches, so that they can award points for performance?

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<sup>5</sup> Even where preaching takes place in a 'pioneering' sense, church life must be the aim – see Matt. 28:19-20.

<sup>6</sup> Think about the way 'converts' at Billy Graham campaigns were directed to churches of every hue and description.

Do not think that I am trying to jest. The risk is very real. Two thousand years ago Seneca warned that ‘some come to hear, not to learn, just as we go to the theatre, for pleasure, to delight our ears with the speaking or the voice or the plays’. The ‘itching ears’ of 2 Timothy 4:3 have been described as belonging to those who hear ‘for mere gratification’. Preachers need to bear this in mind and show they have taken account of it. I refer you to Ezekiel 33:30-33:

As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother: ‘Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD’. So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as my people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. And when this comes to pass – surely it will come – then they will know that a prophet has been among them.

The point is clarified by realising that preachers are not meant to preach ‘for’ us, but ‘to’ us. We do not want a demonstration or exhibition of preaching; we need a thrust from God.

What I am trying to raise is the issue – the danger, in our generation – of weakening the link between the church, along with its discipline, and preaching: the risk that preaching can exist in isolation. It would appear that the Puritan history of the 1590s is repeating itself. One lesson which history teaches us is that we are very slow to learn from history! The conforming Puritan preachers of the late 16th and early 17th centuries were excellent in their unfolding of the great doctrines of Scripture; they set out the Reformed faith with clarity and power. But their church life was often a shambles, as they went along with the corruptions of the State Church and let things slide. That was wrong. What is more, I put it to you that history *is* repeating itself. How?

There are plenty of Calvinistic books, magazines, articles and tapes, Reformed conferences, Bible rallies, theological CD-ROMs and downloads, and all the rest of it, these days, are there not? Indeed, we are glutted with access to information. We shall soon have all the great spiritual works of the ages on our computer screens at the touch of a button. We have more information than we could digest in a lifetime – and all at our fingertips. But information is not knowledge. Nevertheless, preaching has been restored to something like its proper place in the estimate of many Christians. Things are looking up! But wait a moment. While all this is going on, what of the local churches? In what state are they? I do not mean numerically only – I mean spiritually, above all. It is at this point that a large gap is opening, or has opened, between the theory of

the Reformed faith and its practical application to contemporary church life in many cases. Not all, of course – there are examples of fine reforming churches, but they are the exception. Theological learning and preaching can often be divorced from the day-to-day reform of the church. They can become the occupation of the professional, thriving in a bookish world of their own. They can happily exist in a kind of Calvinistic vacuum, cosy but useless, lost in a scholarly haze. Where this is happening, it ought to be put right.

This is similar to what occurred with Perkins and his fellow-conforming Puritans. Only similar, it is fair to say. Perkins and his like were soul-saving preachers. But that kind of preaching is at a premium today. It must be said, however, that although the Puritans' preaching was excellent, their church life was allowed to drift. Ah! but they were free to preach, after all; did that not exonerate them? At the risk of bringing the wrath of many down upon me, I say again that what they did was a mistake, even wrong. And it is a wrong which is frequently repeated. Preaching becomes an end and not a means. For some people, preaching figures more highly than the church of Jesus Christ. For example, churches are thought of as preaching-centres; the preaching opportunity becomes all important. The church exists for preaching. Now the reasons and the intention behind this might well be good, but it does not make it right. The horse has worked his way round to end up behind the cart.

Let me justify my claim that churches are thought of as preaching centres. It is very easy to do so. According to the biography of Martyn Lloyd-Jones already referred to, one of the reasons why Lloyd-Jones was prepared to go to Marylebone in the 1930s, was ‘because he believed that the Marylebone church could be made into a centre of evangelical preaching’. Again, when Campbell Morgan wrote to the officers at Westminster Chapel in 1935, he reminded the church that in his previous time there he ‘came to make it a centre for Bible interpretation and application’. There it is – ‘a centre for preaching’, ‘a centre for Bible interpretation and application’. The intention was to do good by making the pulpit into a pulpit of distinction. The church became a ‘centre’ for preaching.

Well, someone might ask, what is wrong with that? Reader, I am not ‘nit-picking’, I assure you. To regard a church as a pulpit or a platform or a preaching-centre is wrong. It is utterly wrong! It is foreign to the New Testament. A gap has developed between preaching and church life. This is the point I am trying to make – laboriously, some might say! The church has become a platform for the preacher. But churches are far more than that, or they ought to be. We do not need preaching-centres, but we must have vigorous local churches. Of course, preaching is a vital part of church

life – the apostles' teaching came first in Acts 2:42 – nevertheless, preaching is not the be-all and end-all of church life. Preaching and teaching are major aspects of it, certainly, but the church is bigger than both. There is a parallel with Mark 2:27. 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath'. In other words, preachers and teachers are for the church, and not the church for the preacher. We need something more than preaching-centres. We need churches which are experiencing the full range of New Testament life.

I acknowledge there have been exceptions, but in all this there is a real danger of concentrating on the preaching, and forgetting the hearer. I recall a senior nurse telling me how a student had been concerned at the idiosyncratic behaviour of the various dials on the machines which were surrounding the patient's bed. The senior nurse assured the student by directing her to look at the patient – she's alright! I am not advocating the ignoring of the dials – but what about the patient? Broadening the point, is our National Health Service in danger of giving the impression of concentrating on targets and ticking boxes, *and forgetting the patient?* Coming to *the point*, churches are pastoring, caring, shepherding societies, as well as places where preaching occurs.

I realise that I may have mistakenly given the impression that I discount preaching, that I think little of it. Nothing could be further from the truth. I will not stop to say what I really think about the great business; see my forthcoming book on Sandemanianism. Yet, notwithstanding my regard for the importance of preaching, I am convinced that nothing should weaken our enjoyment of biblical church life. Unfortunately, I am afraid that we may have abused the glorious rediscovery of Calvinism, with its proper stress upon preaching, and be in danger of neglecting the life of the church.

In the light of the above, I think the words of Lloyd-Jones himself which I quoted in the Introduction are highly significant. They are worth repeating. He said: 'Nothing... is more important for us... than to understand this picture and conception of the... church which the apostle places before us. It is our failure as Christian people to understand what our church membership means – the dignity, the privilege, and the responsibility – that causes most of our troubles. Our greatest need is to recapture the New Testament teaching concerning the church. If only we could see ourselves in terms of it, we would realize that we are the most privileged people on earth, that there is nothing to be compared with being a Christian and a member of the mystical body of Christ...'. This quotation, coupled with the earlier references from his biography, surely illustrates the need we have of constantly ensuring that our theory and our practice keep in step with each other.

Lamentably, despite the growth of Calvinistic interest, many churches *are* a grievous shambles these days. Reader, what of your church life? For many Christians it is in a dire condition and at a very low ebb indeed. If this is true, then what we have is grotesque in the extreme. Reformed talk and Calvinistic creeds a-plenty going hand-in-hand with tragic confusion and disorder in many churches! We hear a great deal about Reformed pulpits today, yet what about Reformed pews? Reformed ministers are good, but Reformed churches are better. They are New Testament. We know the names of the churches of the New Testament, but we do not know the names of the preachers in them, by and large. We know about Perkins at Cambridge in the 1590s – what was happening to the churches? In what condition was the Church of England in Cambridge, the Church of which Perkins was a minister? The emphasis in Scripture is upon the church, not the preacher. It is not the number of books and commentaries published, it is not the seminaries, hospitals and academies started, it is not the old-people's homes and schools established, which counts in the end. It is the welfare of the church which matters. Christ said that he had founded his church and that he would build it. The church! The church is Christ's sole institution. This fact can be blurred so very easily, and forgotten or ignored. It ought not to be. It is the local church which counts in our service for God.

In saying this, I would not be misunderstood. It is not the institution, itself, which is vital. It is the end, the purpose, the point of that institution which is vital. And what is that? The glory of God, and the edification of the believing men and women who make up the churches.

Reader, if you are a church member it is your duty to do all you can to make sure your church is as close to the New Testament as possible. You must not leave it to others. Too often church members talk about 'they' and 'them' when they refer to their local church. What they should say is 'we' and 'us'. *They* are not responsible – *we* are. It is our responsibility to help reform our local church life. The conforming Puritans, during the latter part of Elizabeth's reign, failed miserably in this respect. For all their wonderful preaching, publishing and teaching, they failed to get on with this very important task which was in front of them, namely the thorough reform of the church. They should have preached for practical godliness, and reformed the church at the same time. It was not a question of either/or in their day; nor is it for us. The 'doctrinal Puritans' were good, but there were others who were better. They saw things more clearly, carried on the battle for the church, and were prepared to meet the cost. They did not allow an uneasy truce to develop with the enemy. They did not merely grumble about disorder. They did not allow a queen to tell them how to

obey the Lord Christ. Oh no! They fought the fight to reform the church, and they fought it with vigour.

The conforming Puritan preachers, at the end of Elizabeth's reign and onwards, have much to teach us. But we must not blind our eyes to their mistakes in a welter of hero-worship. We must now turn our attention to the men and women who did not give up the battle for the church in the 1590s. They, too, have something to say to us. Something we do well to pay heed to. The trouble is, the vast majority of present-day Christians know practically nothing about them and the things God accomplished through them. This must be put right.

## *'Boiled Roots'*

Where do wars and fights come from among you?

James 4:1

*Puritans and Separatists compared – the Act of 1593 – the Ancient church moves to Amsterdam – their views on ‘the pastor’ – Ainsworth – their Confession – Francis Johnson – children in worship – quarrels within the church – divisions*

A dramatic shift took place in the battle to recover the life and order of the New Testament church in England during the 1590s and onwards. Since the conforming Puritans had largely given up the fight, in the main it was left to the despised and persecuted Separatists to carry it on – it was they who now ‘took up the weapons against the established Church as the Puritans were dropping them. The vestment controversy had worn itself out. The old leaders of it were dead or had conformed’. Thus the conforming Puritans drew back from the struggle, leaving the field to be occupied by the Separatists. As I have explained, those Puritans who conformed devoted themselves to preaching – and they did it very effectively. But the fact is they gave up the struggle to obtain a truly reformed church. The Separatists did not.

Now, although they were sneered at, and their names have been almost lost in obscurity or suffered through grievous neglect, it must not be thought that the Separatist preachers were ineffective, powerless or intellectually weak. That would be to make a terrible mistake and do a gross injustice to them. Nor did they neglect their writing while they engaged in the struggle to get the church back to the New Testament. The truth is, there were spiritual giants among them. And when comparisons are made with the conforming Puritans – as they inevitably are – it must be borne in mind that the Separatists had to do their works while suffering under the terrors of persecution and the privations of exile. They were not favoured, cloistered Fellows at Cambridge, or chaplains to various Puritan landowners, with all the advantages of relative ease, free access to a study whose walls were weighed down with book-lined shelves, and whose daily experience was rounded off with the congenial living which those positions entailed. It has been justly said:

Not only were the Separatists logical, but their action required far more courage than that of the mere [conforming] Puritans. Not only did the act itself call for a higher degree of intellectual daring, but the penalties attached to it were greater. In many cases, [conformity], so far from entailing loss or

suffering, possessed a distinct monetary and social value; but no highly-paid cure or easy berth in the household of a Puritan nobleman awaited the Separatist. Misguided as many of the latter may have been, and disappointing as were many of the Separatist movements, it would seem that, on the whole, the Separatists possessed more sincerity and loyalty to their ideas than the Puritans who remained within the Church. This the great majority of them [the Puritans] did.

Just a word or two on the ‘highly-paid cure or easy berth’ for the Puritans. Their congregations within the Church of England usually increased the salaries of their ministers beyond the usual rate, to as much as two or three times. Thus the conforming Puritans drew their Church of England wages, plus the extra from their own congregations, while denouncing – or at least disagreeing violently with – the State Church whose ministers they were. For this reason it can be fairly said:

Here at any rate, was a very tangible reward for those who felt they could remain in an institution which they condemned, while they drew pay from both sides. Many a poor... parish priest... must have wondered whether it were not worldly-wise to turn Puritan; and a Separatist had to console himself with a logical position and a comfortable conscience.

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Elizabeth, for all her outward stubbornness, had been inwardly affected by the hangings of the Separatist leaders, Penry, Barrowe and Greenwood. The queen had over-stepped the mark and she knew it. She was shaken, forced to recognise that the Separatists and Anabaptists could be as resolute as she. They were not going to be broken; no, neither by torture nor by prison. Therefore Elizabeth changed tack and opted for expulsion. Discharging many from the gaols, she banished them from England by an Act designed to ‘retain the queen’s Majesty’s servants in due obedience’. This enforced exile from ‘all the queen’s Majesty’s dominions’ was to be ‘for ever’. The Conventicle Act of 1593 made it illegal for any person above the age of sixteen to refuse to attend the parish church, or to go to a conventicle – that is, a Separatist meeting. Imprisonment was the automatic punishment for one offence; three months’ nonconformity meant banishment from the realm; any further offence would lead to death by hanging. The measures adopted in the Act of 1593 had staggering consequences, far beyond the queen’s intention or comprehension. So much so, it has been asserted that:

No event has had a greater influence on the government of the world and the success of the Christian religion than the transplantation of Englishmen which then commenced. What Elizabeth intended to do, and no doubt thought she had done, was to secure her dominions, for all time to come, from being

troubled by Separatists. But absolutism in a State is as short-sighted as intolerance in a Church, and in the Tudor queen absolutism and intolerance were combined. What, therefore, she did do was to plant nurseries of freedom, destined, at a future period, to be fatal to the very principles of political and ecclesiastical government whose permanency she had thought to secure.

It will be recalled that John Penry, just before his death, had urged the Separatist, Ancient church to emigrate, and to take special care of the widows and orphans in their flight. Most of the church followed his counsel so that, by the end of 1593, it was in two portions, with the larger in Amsterdam and the smaller in London. Yet they continued to regard themselves as one church in two parts – despite a hundred miles of salt water in between!

The Ancient church, formed in 1592, had appointed Francis Johnson as its pastor, and John Greenwood its teacher. But, by the end of 1593, Greenwood was dead, hanged for his faith, and the church was in these two parts. After a while, the church elected Henry Ainsworth as its teacher in Amsterdam, but – naturally – the pastor could only be in one place at a time. While Francis Johnson was in London, for most of the time he was in prison! Thus that portion of the church which was in Amsterdam had no pastoral care, and so according to their views – as expressed by Henry Barrowe – they could not have the Lord's supper or baptise since they felt only the pastor could administer the ordinances.

This was surely a mistake. It shows that the Separatists still had ill-formed opinions of church government and the nature of a church, especially with regard to the man they called 'the pastor'. Yet this is hardly surprising since they were breaking new ground after twelve hundred years of Popery and sixty years of Church of England dominance of religious affairs; or, to be more accurate, since the Separatists were trying to get back to the New Testament. Reader, while it is true that they were muddled in their views, we must not forget the yokel who was asked the way to a certain town. If I was going there, I wouldn't start from here, was his less-than-helpful reply. The Separatists were making mistakes on the way, yes, but at least they were going in the right direction. And, to be fair, although the Separatists at the end of the 16th century were confused over 'the pastor' issue, they were not alone. Whenever Puritans over-emphasised their pastors, they were in the wrong, too. And, of course, the Anglicans went the whole hog and called them priests.

That said, it has to be faced that there was a serious error involved in this attitude towards the pastor and his relationship to the church. We are not yet free of it; like the poor it will always be with us, it seems. It not only survives; it is very much alive and kicking. Some Christians – many – have wrong views of the subject. What is more, these views stem from the same source as did the notions of the early Separatists; namely, a

misplaced emphasis on a man. This stress upon the pastor is misplaced because, according to the New Testament, the church is more important than a pastor; the church exists before a pastor; the church can exist without a pastor; the church can and must discipline a pastor if necessary. In other words the church can and must carry out its proper privileges, including the ordinances of Christ, with or without the pastor, if need be.<sup>1</sup>

The stark truth is, in many of today's churches the pastor has been given an importance which is foreign to the New Testament. For example, what were the names of the pastors of the churches of the New Testament? Nobody knows, they have not been recorded. Paul did not write to them. He wrote to the saints, the church members at Rome, Ephesus and the rest. When he did write to the bishops and deacons, he did not address them by name. Is this important? Well, things are very different today; glaringly so! Very, very frequently – almost invariably – Christians refer, not to the church in any given place, but to the pastor. Pastor so-and-so's church is there – he's a good man, they say. It is wrong to do it. Nobody ever spoke in this way in the New Testament. Why should we? It is not 'pastor so-and-so's church', is it? It is Christ's church!

It might be justly pointed out that I have frequently written about 'pastors' in this book. Why have I done so? Well, I have tried to write in a scriptural way, but when dealing with historical events and the historical use of words, I have been forced to keep to the terms used by the people involved. My own preference would have been to use New Testament terms, and only New Testament terms, throughout – elder, bishop, pastor-and-teacher, overseer, and so on – treating them as the New Testament does, as one and the same, all equal (Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-2; 5:17; Tit. 1:5-7; Jas. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1). But sadly it has not been possible. Too many believers, during the years I have written about, hankered after prelacy. Even today, there is a liking for hierarchy among many Nonconformists; it is a desire which is very deep-seated.

I realise that my words will anger some, but I am convinced they need to be said, and I deplore the need to say it. I know that even to mention the issue will offend many. Barrowe, you will recall, gave himself away to the prison authorities by expressing his views on the matter. And so hateful was the notion of the equality of elders that, during the time of Laud, as will be made clear in due course, John Bastwicke was sent to prison for writing in defence of the principle.

Indeed, there is something even more fundamentally wrong with calling a man 'the pastor'. Why, nowhere in the New Testament is any man called *a* pastor; certainly no man is ever addressed as *the* pastor. Furthermore, the

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<sup>1</sup> For more on what follows, see my forthcoming *The Pastor: Does He Exist?*.

New Testament always speaks of each church having several elders, never one pastor. Nor does it know anything of a scheme which is becoming common today – that of having several elders with one of them being singled out as ‘the pastor’. As I have just pointed out, all elders are pastors – if the word is allowed at all. I recognise that not all elders can be or should be separated to the ministry and so receive financial support (1 Tim. 5:17), but it is wrong to distinguish one man by coining a title for him. To do so means that these churches have invented for themselves a third order of minister, whereas the New Testament knows of only two – bishops (elders) and deacons (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-15).

What is more, the word ‘pastors’ appears only once – in Ephesians 4:11 – in the phrase ‘pastors and teachers’ – and most commentators take this to refer to one office, speaking of one and the same man, the pastor-teacher. In other words, ‘pastor’ never appears in the New Testament as a word in its own right, certainly never as a title. This may surprise some readers, so ingrained is the use of the soubriquet. To cap it all, the New Testament knows nothing whatsoever of titles. Indeed, Christ directly forbids the practice (Matt. 23:8-9). Why, therefore, is it the almost universal custom today? Why?

You see, reader, I have not been splitting hairs. The creation of titles and their use in the church leads to a direct contradiction of the command of Christ, and the setting up of a third order of minister – something in itself which is entirely unscriptural and totally unwarranted. And it is yet another subtle way of introducing or maintaining hierarchy in the churches. Why can we not get back to the proper use of scriptural words? Why do so many disobey Christ? Prelacy has been brought into Nonconformist churches – by the back door.

In the case of the Ancient church, surely it should have been possible to have the Lord’s supper without the presence of Francis Johnson! If not, we have gone full circle and established a kind of Separatist popery. Allowing the term for sake of argument, can a church not baptise without a pastor? Can it not recognise an elder when it has none? Think of the logical consequences if this last point is not granted. It must be possible for a church without an elder to recognise such a man, otherwise it is condemned to remain in that unscriptural condition for ever. Why, then, can a church carry out some aspects of its life without a pastor, and not others? In any event, as I have observed, part of the trouble in the Ancient church was a reliance upon a single pastor, whereas the New Testament always speaks of a plurality of elders in each church. This one scriptural reform would have removed entirely this particular difficulty for the Ancient church.

All these points merit further development, but I must keep the book within bounds!<sup>2</sup> I wish to say, however, that I do not want to give the impression that I have little regard for Christ's gifts to his church, pastor-teachers among them (Eph. 4:11). Certainly not! But neither do I want to make popes of them! It has been done times without number. Has been? It can be so today. Can be? It is!

Here are two up-to-date examples of how frightening this unacceptable emphasis on 'the pastor' can be. The first concerns a Reformed Baptist church where 'the pastor' was away, and the service was to be taken by a deacon – a man who looks upon 'the pastor' in the way I have deplored. This deacon was approached on the way into the meeting by a stranger who asked if there was a service there that evening? The deacon replied to the effect, No, since 'the pastor' was not present; upon which the stranger walked off! What a catastrophe that might turn out to be – on the basis that without 'the pastor' the church could not possibly hold a proper meeting. In what spiritual state was the stranger; was he seeking after salvation? Was he turned away, not only from the meeting but from... what? Who knows?

The second example concerns a letter printed in the *Evangelical Times*, October, 1994, printed with the obvious approval of the Editor. The letter from 'a sin-sick soul' was a virtual confession of sin to 'the pastor' with the urgent request that 'the pastor' should pray for this 'sin-sick soul'. The writer could not even address 'the pastor' by his name! The letter and what it represented boiled down to unadulterated priestcraft! Confession of sin to 'the pastor'? Desire for 'the pastor' to pray; could the man (or woman) not pray for himself? Christ was not mentioned once! And the man knew what was wrong in his life but, instead of putting it right, he shuffled his responsibility onto God and 'the pastor'. The letter, and its publication, was an offence to all those who reject Popery, or it ought to have been. So this is what 'the pastor' business comes to. Pastor and priest are not so very different in spelling, and when men and women hold the kind of views revealed in the letter, pastor and priest are virtually the same in more ways than mere spelling. Milton was right, was he not – presbyter can be priest merely writ large. As Charles Hodge said: 'The people should not place their confidence in ministers, who belong to the church, and not the church to them'. Quite right!

There is a further point to be made, however. Even though the Ancient church was too scrupulous over the conduct of the Lord's supper – with respect to the absence of their pastor – what a contrast to the unthinking attitude of many today. Many Christians take the Lord's supper here, there

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<sup>2</sup> As I say, see my forthcoming *The Pastor: Does He Exist?*.

and everywhere – or nowhere! – with little or no discipline, or hardly a thought of it. Many churches are very lax about the ordinance. The early Separatists were too finicky, it must be said; but how much more worthy of Christ and the New Testament than today's flabby attitude!

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To return to the history: After about four years of enforced separation, the pastor, elders and deacons of the Ancient church eventually managed to get to Amsterdam and settle there, thus leaving the small London portion of the church devoid of all pastoral care. This London rump made no attempt at separate organisation, and the last to be heard of it was in 1624, totally without resident officers.

By this enforced emigration, the battle for the church moved to Amsterdam at the end of the 16th century, where, it is true, the Separatists were out of prison and free to worship God. But they were exiled, in extreme poverty and, to state the obvious, among a people who spoke a foreign language; altogether a daunting prospect. They took up what manual trades they could find, even though these only paid a pittance of about sixpence a week. If it had not been for a legacy of Henry Barrowe, along with the kindness of the Dutch magistrates and some Puritans who were settled abroad, they would have perished by starvation.

Henry Ainsworth at first was a porter to a bookseller but, as I have said, he soon became the teacher of the church. He was so poor he was forced to live on ‘boiled roots’. Ainsworth, a remarkable man, modest, retiring and amiable, was born in 1570 in Swanton, Norfolk, and died at the age of fifty-two, after a long and painful illness. Of a delicate constitution, his life was cut short by endless quarrels caused by others, and by his own ceaseless labours and severe trials, some of which will feature in this account. In his youth, he entered Caius at Cambridge, but it is possible that he did not complete his university education, for some reason we cannot discover. It was said that ‘he scarce set foot within a college walls’, yet he was reckoned to be one of the best Greek and Hebrew scholars of his day throughout Europe, being commonly known as ‘that renowned Hebraist’. He was acclaimed as mighty in the Scriptures. Indeed, he was noted for his outstanding preaching ability, being a profound and moving teacher. He showed a thorough acquaintance with Scripture to the extent of being able to quote the exact words of a text without any reference to the book. He was also a prolific writer, publishing works in Latin in addition to English, twenty-three volumes altogether, among which were versions of the Psalms, a collection of *Annotations* on various parts of Scripture, including the entire Pentateuch, besides some attempts at sacred song. He was no slouch!

The Ancient church met with other difficulties in Holland, in addition to their poverty and the problems of a foreign language. The Dutch and French pastors in the Low Countries were very suspicious of this group of refugee Separatists who had the audacity to set themselves against the Church of England and the Puritans! Most of them were obviously unlearned, working class and poor, yet they claimed to have the truth. And only they! Impertinence of a high order!

The church was well aware of its difficulty, so, to clear up any misunderstanding, in 1596 it published *A True Confession of the Faith*. The preface opened out all the cruelties and wrongs they had suffered in England at the hands of the prelates, and it is obvious that they felt bitterly misused. As we have seen, they certainly had been! They rightly complained that their enemies had treated them with ‘barbarous cruelty’, and would not answer them in ‘free writing and conference... but as savage beasts rending and tearing us with their teeth... greedily hunting after Christ’s poor lambs... misusing their bodies with all exquisite tyranny in long and lamentable imprisonment’.

The *Confession* went on to develop forty-five articles to explain the doctrine, order and practice of the Ancient church. It was clearly Calvinistic in its view of salvation. On the burning issue of the status of the Church of England, the writers were blunt and dogmatic. Reformation is essential, the State Church is corrupt, and the people of God must leave it, they declared. On the ministry, they believed that it is a matter for each particular church, and only that church, to sort out. And they held that the minister depends on that church’s recognition and appointment for his authority. But at this stage they were still grievously muddled over the place and power of the magistrate, for they expected the magistrates to put a stop to corrupt ministry and worship, saying that princes and magistrates were duty bound to ‘suppress and root out, by their authority, all false ministries, voluntary religions, and counterfeit worship of God. Yea, to enforce all their subjects, whether ecclesiastical or civil, to do their duties to God and men’. These were amazing words from men who themselves had suffered so much under this totally unscriptural view! It shows how ingrained Constantine thinking had become in the minds of men. As is clear, they mistakenly did not confine the magistrate’s duties to the civil realm as the New Testament does. Though they had been dealt with by intolerance in their spiritual affairs, they wished to deal with others in exactly the same way. Religion is nothing if it is not voluntary, yet the Ancient church wanted the magistrate to enforce a voluntary religion! It can hardly be credited. Alas, they were not alone in continuing with this evil.

What of the pastor of the Ancient church, Francis Johnson, meanwhile? What do we know of him? He had not always been a Separatist, so how did he become one? What were his abilities and qualities? William Bradford, later Governor in New England, gave him high praise when he said that ‘he was a very grave man... and an able teacher; and was the most solemn in all his administrations that we have seen any’. This fine testimony must not be forgotten when we come to look at the catalogue of Johnson’s later failures, and his dismal end.

Johnson was born in Richmond, Yorkshire, in 1562. Graduating at Cambridge, he became a Fellow and was, at that time, a staunch Presbyterian. What is more, there is evidence that in his heart he was never anything different. Never one to fight shy of conflict, on the 6th of January, 1588, he preached at St Mary’s, Cambridge, on 1 Peter 5:1-4, when he insisted on the Presbyterian system. For this he was imprisoned, and then expelled from the University. Retracing the footsteps of Cartwright, who had gone ahead about fifteen years before, he became a comfortably well-off minister in Middleburg among the English merchants there. In 1591, he came across a newly-printed batch of copies of a book by the Separatists Barrowe and Greenwood and, being ‘exceedingly mad’ against them, persuaded the magistrates to confiscate and burn the entire consignment. Standing by to oversee the bonfire, he saved two copies in order that he might read the offensive material for himself, refute it and then publish his findings. Interestingly, he knew the Separatists’ book was wrong and had it burned even though he had not read it! But, as he read the book, he was quite overcome by the arguments of Barrowe and Greenwood. (It is pleasing to be able to report that fourteen years later, to make amends he republished the work entirely at his own expense). Having been persuaded, he did not stifle his conscience nor cling to his easy life-style, but threw in his lot with the Separatists, and thereby brought upon himself poverty, imprisonment and suffering. He gave up his prosperous Presbyterian position, returned to London at once, and sought out Barrowe who was then in the Fleet prison. Thus he joined the group of Separatists in London, and became its pastor when the church was formed in 1592. He narrowly escaped the fate of hanging suffered by Barrowe, Greenwood and Penry but, nevertheless, he was locked in the Clink for five miserable years. George, his brother, was detained at the same time in the Fleet, while the elder of the Ancient church, Daniel Studley, was held in Newgate.

As a consequence of Elizabeth’s measures to clear the gaols, Johnson, his brother, Studley and another ‘stiff-necked’ Separatist were eventually released upon condition that they sailed for an island in the Gulf of St Lawrence. They duly set sail with some merchant adventurers in a convoy of two vessels on the 8th of April, 1597. When one of the ships foundered

upon rocks, the other rescued all hands, and then returned to England. The Separatists were now in an impossible position – since death by hanging awaited any who broke the rules of banishment. Accordingly, they hid in London, and then escaped to Amsterdam in September, 1597, where they were at last reunited with the church.

In spite of all the difficulties caused by their poverty, the misunderstandings by the Dutch and French, a foreign language to cope with, and the absence of their pastor for such a long time, the Ancient church ‘flourished exceedingly’ in Amsterdam. So much so, by the turn of the century, it had three hundred members, now under the combined care of Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth, men of the highest spiritual and mental calibre. The church also appointed four ruling elders, three deacons, and a deaconess, a widow of advanced years, who sat with a birch rod in her hand to keep ‘the little children in great awe from disturbing the congregation’, besides doing acts of kindness among the women, such as arranging sick-care and poor-relief where necessary. It is possible that the deaconess was required to discipline the children in the services because the church had a great many orphans to take care of.

These arrangements raise a practical, interesting – and important – question for us; namely the way a church deals with children. There has been much talk about this in recent years and many innovations have been introduced to cope with children. However, not all measures which have been adopted have been sensible, let alone scriptural, and we could learn something from days long past. For a start, in the Ancient church the children were not allowed to disturb the congregation in the service. Things have certainly changed. Nowadays the adults must not be allowed to disturb the children! Preachers are told they must cut their sermons short to cater for them (or rather, their parents, who find their children a convenient excuse); superficial, supposedly amusing stories occupy the children’s ‘slot’; ‘children’s services’ and ‘family services’ replace the proper worship of God. That, and worse, is frequently a feature of church services today. The Ancient church knew nothing of all this. Evidently, the early Separatists would not recognise the modern over-emphasis upon children in worship. But what is of far greater importance, there is not the slightest justification in the New Testament for any cultivation of ‘youthism’ in the church.

On the other hand, the Ancient church did not countenance a wholesale removal of the children from the service. It is apparent that they did not have any procedure whereby the children of believers were taken out of meetings. They knew nothing of ‘children’s church,’ for example. This is very different to the attitude common today. Furthermore, children who were capable of interrupting the congregation and capable of being

corrected, were corrected and not removed. Was that not right? There is no suggestion of anything to the contrary in the New Testament. As for the Old Testament, the children of the Israelites were present with their parents in worship, and the parents instructed their children as to the meaning, significance and importance of what took place. Indeed, the children were deliberately exposed to the worship of God and his ordinances with the express purpose that they could – and should – ask about it:

You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, his testimonies, and his statutes which he has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD... When your son asks you in time to come, saying: ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgements which the LORD our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe... Then he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in, to give us the land of which he swore to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us’ (Deut. 6:17-25). When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying: ‘What are these stones?’ then you shall let your children know, saying... (Josh. 4:21-24).

God did his mighty works among his people for many purposes, one of which was the spiritual instruction of succeeding generations of children by their parents. Concerning his dealings with Pharaoh, God said:

For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD (Exod. 10:1-2).

This instruction of the children was to be a part of the perpetual remembrance of God’s dealings with his people, and one of the ways in which the fear of God would be kept alive in Israel. The ‘little ones’ were not excluded (Josh. 8:35). When they were settled in the land of promise, the Hebrew people had to keep the Passover strictly according to the commands of God, and this included instruction of the sons by the fathers:

And you shall tell your son in that day, saying: ‘This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up out from Egypt’... So shall it be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying: ‘What is this?’ that you shall say to him: ‘By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt... Therefore I

sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem' (Exod. 13:8,14-15). (See also Exod. 12:24-28).

Joshua did this at the earliest opportunity (Josh. 5:1-12).

Notice how frank and full the instruction had to be. No keeping back the difficult bits! Very often today, children are taught merely the stories, and not given the principles of God's word. Very little doctrine is given to them. Timothy knew the holy Scriptures from childhood – and that means from a very early age – certainly from infancy. The Greek word is used to speak of Christ in the manger (Luke 2:16). It is used even of John when he was in the womb of his mother (Luke 1:41). Timothy had learned and been assured of the Scriptures by the teaching of his mother and grandmother from his earliest days. They did not wait until he had become a teenager. And they taught him more than memory verses, for he had learned 'the things' – the doctrines, arguments and principles of the Scriptures. He knew the meaning of them (2 Tim. 3:14-15). It goes without saying that the teaching was suited to his capacity to learn; but the capacity of children is enormous. Do not underestimate it. Ask the Jesuits! They require only a few years to indoctrinate infants in their 'care'.

I ask: Is the biblical training of children a common occurrence these days? If not, why not? Is it that the parents are unfamiliar with God's word themselves? If so, it must be put right. Please notice Paul's reference to Timothy's teachers – 'knowing from whom you have learned'. The quality of the things taught is vital, but so is the quality of the teacher, his or her character and life-style. Parents who would have their children walk in truth (3 John 4) must walk in that truth themselves. The children must be *led*, not driven. They will rapidly detect any discrepancy between what is taught and what is – or is not – lived out. And they will do so from their earliest days.

This need for a full explanation to children of God's ways and works is further brought to our attention by God's use of Joel to stir his people to carry out his ordinances in this regard. He said the children had to know the 'whys and wherefores' of God's works, even of his judgements upon the land. 'Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation' (Joel 1:3), was the command of God. The youngest of children were expected to figure in the sacred assemblies, including those called on the solemn fast days (Joel 2:15-17).

It is readily admitted that this is a task which needs much perseverance, grace and understanding. But it is a great privilege for believing parents. And it is their duty. In short: 'And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up' (Deut. 6:6-7).

These principles applied both in the public ordinances of God and in the private affairs of the home.

As I said earlier, there is nothing in the New Testament to make us believe that these or similar principles do not still apply. No! There is nothing to suggest that the children of believers ought to be anything other than present in public worship, to hear the preaching, to observe the Lord's supper, deliberately to be exposed to all of it in order that their curiosity can be aroused, and their parents can explain the spiritual meaning of everything which goes on. This must be part of the way to 'train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it' (Prov. 22:6). Paul wrote to children. Think of it – Paul, the apostle, wrote to children! Observe the way in which he treated them, how he approached them, how he argued out Scripture to them. No foolish tale-spinning from the apostle (Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20). Do you think he would have tolerated children – who were of an age to understand – sitting before him, but colouring pictures, reading other books or playing with toys while he preached? He had something to say to them, and they needed to give him all their attention. They were not in the service to be amused, diverted or ignored. He did not talk down to them. How very different today in many churches. I realise the children in question were far more advanced in age than mere infants, but even so they were children. And Paul spoke directly to them. Are many *adults* in churches these days addressed from the pulpit as solemnly and seriously as Paul spoke to children? I doubt it. Instead of bringing children up, adults are too often brought down. What is the motive for childishness in worship?<sup>3</sup>

Spurgeon, preaching on Exodus 12:21-27, in a sermon entitled *The Blood of Sprinkling and the Children*, came to the passage: 'And it shall be, when your children say to you: "What do you mean by this service?" that you shall say...'. He declared:

Inquiry should be excited in the minds of our children. Oh, that we could get them to ask questions about the things of God! Some of them enquire very early, others of them seem diseased with much the same indifference as older folks. With both orders of mind we have to deal. It is well to explain to children the ordinance of the Lord's supper, for this shows forth the death of Christ in symbol. I regret that children do not oftener see this ordinance. Baptism and the Lord's supper should both be placed in view of the rising generation, that they may then ask us: 'What mean ye by this?' Now, the Lord's supper is a perennial gospel sermon, and it turns mainly upon the sacrifice for sin. You may banish the doctrine of the atonement from the pulpit,

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<sup>3</sup> For George Whitefield addressing children, see my *Particular Redemption and The Free Offer*, where I quote from Whitefield: *Sermons* pp196-197; *Select* pp83-84.

but it will always live in the church through the Lord's supper. You cannot explain that broken bread and that cup filled with the fruit of the vine, without reference to our Lord's atoning death. You cannot explain 'the communion of the body of Christ' without bringing in, in some form or other, the death of Jesus in our place and stead. Let your little ones, then, see the Lord's supper, and let them be told most clearly what it sets forth. And if not the Lord's supper – for that is not the thing itself, but only the shadow of the glorious fact – dwell much and often in their presence upon the sufferings and death of our redeemer. Let them think of Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Golgotha, and let them learn to sing in plaintive tones of him who laid down his life for us. Tell them who it was that suffered, and why... And when attention is excited upon the best of themes, let us be ready to explain the great transaction by which God is just, and yet sinners are justified. Children can well understand the doctrine of the expiatory sacrifice...

Taking up that last point, if it is argued that the children will not understand what is going on, this is obviously so for very young children. But parents have the privilege of explaining matters to their offspring. And it is in the longer term that the full benefit will be reaped. What is more, if the preaching is too difficult for the children to understand, blame the preacher not them, for real preaching will be directed to the children without any loss for the adults.

Listen to Spurgeon again:

Feed... the little children. I begin to feel more and more that it is a mistake to divide the children from the congregation. I believe in special services for children, but I would also have them worship with us. If our preaching does not teach children, it lacks some element which it ought to possess. The kind of preaching which is best of all for grown-up people is that in which children also will take delight. I like to see the congregation made up not all of the young, nor all of the old; not all of the mature, nor all of the inexperienced, but some of all sorts gathered together. If we are teaching children salvation by works, and grown-up people salvation by grace, we are pulling down in the school-room what we build up in the church, and that will never do. Feed the children with the same gospel as the grown-up sheep, though not exactly in the same terms; let your language be appropriate to them, but let it be the same truth. God forbid that we should have our Sunday Schools the hot-beds of Arminianism, while our churches are gardens of Calvinism. We shall soon have a division in the camp if that be so. The same truth for all; and you cannot expect Christ to be with you in feeding your little flocks unless you feed them where Christ feeds us... Oh, for the good old corn of the kingdom; we want that, and I am persuaded that when the churches get back to the old food again... when... the saints get back to the old Puritanic method... then we shall get the church into fellowship with Jesus, and Jesus will do wonders in our midst.

These are real, practical issues. Many churches need urgent reform in this area. Too many churches resemble a kindergarten these days, or else the

children are removed altogether. The infants of Puritans drank in divinity with their mother's milk, it is said. Likewise the Separatists. Spurgeon referred to the old way – the old *is* better. The members of the Puritan and Separatist churches just would not recognise what goes on today. Nor, I suggest, would the members of the New Testament churches. Christian reader, Christian parent, you want to see your children and grandchildren saved, do you not? Of course you do. John, when writing 'to the elect lady' said: 'I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father' (2 John 4). He said, when writing to Gaius: 'I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth' (3 John 3-4).

Well, then, Christian parent, if you desire the same joy, there are biblical principles for you to follow. You must obey God's commands and carry out his ordinances. Do not palm off your children's spiritual upbringing onto others – Sunday School teachers and elders – *you* are responsible. It is *your* duty. It is more – it is your honour, your joy and privilege to bring up your children 'in the training and admonition of the Lord' (Eph. 6:4). Be a Lois or Eunice to your offspring (2 Tim. 1:5). Furthermore, it is a part of your responsibility as a member of your church to encourage that church to see that its arrangements are conducive to this biblical upbringing of your children. Most definitely those arrangements must not militate against it. Too often they do these days.

These points are so vital, and they sound so stark and out-of-place in this generation, a summary is called for:

I have said nothing which reflects a lack of love for children. What more could be desired for a child than that he should be saved? All that I have said is with that purpose.

We have the revealed pattern of church life, its order and worship in the New Testament, and we must never do anything to militate against it. Children must be in worship; they must hear the preaching and observe the ordinances, otherwise they cannot possibly ask about it. And that is the biblical method of dealing with children, is it not? The New Testament knows nothing whatsoever of any special emphasis upon children's work, nor worship by them. They were never segregated by the early church.

Preaching must reach the children, it must be directed towards them, the instruction and application must include them. To have a separate address for children during a preaching service is a confession of failure. It is an error of judgement. Preaching which does not meet the needs of the entire congregation is not preaching. God designed preaching to meet the spiritual needs of all men, women and children, irrespective of age.

It must never be forgotten that Sunday Schools are a late 18th-century innovation. I do not say they are wrong, but they must never assume a place where the New Testament pattern is broken down by an invention of man. Therefore, children must not be in a Sunday School instead of being in the gathering of the church, for instance. No one should be instructing children in a separate meeting when they themselves, as the children, should be sitting under the regular preaching of the gospel. Furthermore, parents must not shuffle off their responsibilities and privileges to others. Christians, in the spiritual realm, must never act like many pagans do when they have children, immediately handing them over to child-minders in order that they can carry on with their giddy life-style.

While the child must be evangelised, so he must be taught to worship. What is more, the New Testament method of evangelism was not, as very often today, aimed at the child in the hope that the parents might follow. No! Paul looked for the conversion of the parents; the child would then be their responsibility. We must not reverse this order. We must not go for the soft option.

It goes without saying that if separate spiritual activities are scripturally unwarranted in the church, there cannot be the slightest justification for meetings to cater for carnal activities and amusements. Yet how very frequently this is a feature of churches nowadays. The aim, the reason, which is commonly trotted out to justify the practice – that is, of doing anything and everything in order to keep young people – is wrong.

To bring this summary to an end I include a few relevant quotes from other men, men of very different styles and backgrounds.

First, Kenneth Macrae. At one Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland a certain proposal came up, a proposal to deal with ‘the lapsing of youth’: that is, young people were not remaining within the Free Church. The proposal was for organisations to be formed ‘to foster friendship among young people’. Macrae wrote: ‘I felt called upon to oppose. I gave warning as to the serious consequences of any attempt to introduce any such thing’. A few months later he prepared a report for the Assembly – a report of his findings when, in 1936, he was instructed by the Assembly to spend some time preaching among churches which had declined, ‘with a view to seeking to persuade the young people of the Church to a greater interest in and zeal for the message and testimony which has been given to the Free Church of Scotland to declare’. Part of his report dealt with the desperate needs of the young people, and he warned that if the Church failed them, their falling away would be inevitable. But that was the very thing which was happening. He went on to say that ‘the great mission of some churches would almost appear to be to amuse their young people...’.

Some time later he prepared an address on the subject, entitled *Youth and the Church*. He deplored ‘the modern idea... the segregation of youth... inside the Church so as to keep the youth... It takes many forms... in liberal churches the provision of guilds, clubs, amusements... in more conservative circles – fellowships, conventions...’. He highlighted ‘the great breakdown, the decay of vital religion... seen in the preaching... in attendance... in decline of family discipline’. The only hope for a ‘restoration’ was in a return to ‘sound vital preaching. But this is what this age will not have’, he complained. ‘And the idea of the segregation of youth seems to many evangelicals to be the only answer to the problem!’ Peering into the darkening future he confessed: ‘We do not know where such an irresponsible movement will ultimately land [that is, what it will lead to]’. He concluded by saying: ‘Nothing can be better than the old biblical system of a former day which taught that the stated means of grace were for all age-groups’.

My second quotation is another from Spurgeon. When lecturing to his students on *Attention!*, he said: ‘To a rational preacher (and all are not rational) it must seem essential to interest all his audience, from the eldest to the youngest. We ought not to make even children inattentive. “Make them inattentive,” say you, “who does that?” I say that most preachers do; and when children are not quiet in a meeting it is often as much our fault as theirs. Can you not put in a little story or parable on purpose for the little ones? Can you not catch the eye of the boy in the gallery, and the little girl downstairs, who have begun to fidget, and smile them into order? I often talk with my eyes to the orphan boys at the foot of my pulpit. We want all eyes fixed upon us and all ears open to us. To me it is an annoyance if even a blind man does not look at me with his face. If I see anybody turning round, whispering, nodding, or looking at his watch, I judge I am not up to the mark, and must by some means win these minds. Very seldom have I to complain, and when I do, my general plan is to complain of myself, and own that I have no right to attention unless I know how to command it’.

My last is from Lloyd-Jones. Now, as regards his preaching, as he himself said: ‘According to modern standards my ideas on preaching are all wrong’. He was too long, too difficult, gave too many reasons and arguments in his sermons, put in too much teaching, and so on. New converts should never hear him, nobody under conviction should go anywhere near him, and all the rest of it. Such, he admitted, was the modern assessment of his preaching. However, when he fell ill and could not preach for a while, he received many letters. He said: ‘The letter I prize was from a little girl aged twelve who wrote on behalf of herself and her brother, unbeknown to their parents, saying that they were praying for my recovery and hoping that I would soon be back in the pulpit. She then gave

the reason for this, and that is what pleased me so much. She said, "because you are the only preacher we can understand".

This matter of children in worship is so important, I will return to it in later chapter. I must not trespass on any more space just now! But may I suggest places where further material can be read, excellent material, from what many would consider surprising sources. How is that men like Spurgeon, Whitefield, M'Cheyne, Brainerd, Ryle and others were able to preach to children, and not only to adults? See how Jonathan Edwards addressed the children in his farewell sermon at Northampton, Massachusetts, for instance. Much profit could be gained from reading an article by Iain Murray, *Children and the Sermon*. Likewise the matter found in issue VII of *The Banner of Truth* June, 1957.

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Unfortunately, the peace of the Ancient church was disrupted, not by noisy children, but by the tendency of the members to rebuke and warn each other over the most trivial matters. The Separatists had rediscovered the New Testament pattern of church life – or something very close to it – and the sudden and radical enlightenment proved rather a heady concoction for most of them. They had made a giant leap from the State Church to an independent church; from magistrates and prelates running every-day Church affairs over the heads of the silent masses, to every member active. What they had left behind in the Church of England was abominable for its laxity, certainly, but they now pressed scrutiny of each other to the limit and beyond. Nothing was excluded, and the church was soon rent by scandals and quarrels.

The unedifying story was told to the world in a highly biased account by George, the brother of Francis Johnson, entitled *A Discourse of some Troubles and Excommunications in the Banished English Church at Amsterdam*. It extended to over two hundred pages! Another ex-member published a *Discovery of Brownism*, a slanderous work and very spiteful. Some others published *The Profane Schism of the Brownists or Separatists*, an unrestrained attack. It is only fair to record that William Bradford painted a different picture. But it is sad to have to say that the quarrels between the Johnson brothers were severe, and concerned the clothes, jewellery and hats of Francis' wife, among other things. Some matters were trivial, but on the other hand some things needed to be discussed. Discipline was required. Some of their strictures would not come amiss in these lax days! For instance, Daniel Studley, the elder already mentioned, was rightly deposed because of immorality. Would that all churches made efforts to secure godliness and practical holiness in the daily life of all the members by mutual, spiritual discipline!

But the worst and saddest dispute of all occurred in 1610. The final disruption was between Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth over the practicalities of rule in the church.

Johnson emphasised the functions, dignity and power of the elders, and left no room for the voice of the church members. He really acted as a tyrant or an inquisitor in the church, and did much harm. He set aside elections, saying that the elders must appoint the teachers, and only the elders can exclude and receive members. He took the line that the elders exercise all church power, the members have none. This issue had been a difficult one for all the Separatists right from the start. Henry Barrowe had been unable to sort out the question satisfactorily, even though he had once insisted that 'all the affairs of the church belong to that body together'. The discussion turned on the interpretation of Matthew 18:17 – 'tell it to the church'. Does this mean the church members (Congregationalism) or the elders (Presbyterianism)? Johnson, who had been a staunch Presbyterian in his younger days, now took a decided stance against the members.

In opposition, Ainsworth contended that the ruling power of the church does not lie in pope, priest, elder or the congregation, but only in Christ. He still agreed that baptism and the Lord's supper could only be administered by the pastor or teacher, but he asserted that the whole church has the power to discipline. The voice of the members must be heard, he declared. He based his arguments upon the priesthood of all believers.

There was no middle way between these two opinions, opinions which could not possibly exist alongside each other within one church, if harmony was to be maintained. The friction between the two men was so great that Ainsworth separated with a large following and began to worship two doors away, whereupon Johnson excommunicated Ainsworth and all with him, with much acrimony. The local authorities were called in, and they decided that the meeting-house rightly belonged to Ainsworth. Johnson moved to Emden with his followers in 1613, but was back in Amsterdam in 1617, still calling himself the pastor of the Ancient church. He died in January, 1618, insisting to the very last that he was in the right in the arguments with the others.

After Johnson's death, some of his followers rejoined the church under Ainsworth, while the rest decided to emigrate to America. They braved the terrors of the Atlantic under harrowing conditions, one hundred and eighty people 'packed like herrings' in an unseaworthy vessel. The captain died during the voyage, the ship drifted aimlessly on the trackless ocean, the food gave out, and dysentery raged among the hapless passengers. At long last, a wretched and pathetic remnant of fifty reached Virginia, where the church was established, in 1619, under an elder called Blackwell.

Meanwhile, the church formed by Ainsworth continued for many years after his death, but early in the 18th century it was united with the Presbyterian church in Amsterdam, and lost its separate identity. Before that, one of its subsequent pastors founded the Broadmead Baptist church in Bristol.

The story of the Ancient church is very, very sad in many respects, and it is altogether too easy to criticise it. The church had started so well, with great enthusiasm, and showed immense promise, but it lost its way. The truth is, these early Separatists were ardent, earnest, mighty men and their rediscovery of New Testament principles was strong, heady stuff for them. Furthermore, since the formation of the church was accompanied by savage persecution, they were not reforming the church in theory from the vantage of a comfortable arm-chair. They were not idle amateurs, languidly dabbling with church reform; they were up to the neck – and beyond – in the life-and-death business. This must not be ignored or dismissed. Nevertheless, it is sad to have to say that the combination of events proved too much for the strong-willed men involved. It has to be admitted that the tales of scandal and church-offence during these turbulent years do not make pleasant reading. And they compare unfavourably with the work of the Puritan preachers back in England who conformed to the established Church. Or do they?

It cannot be denied that the Separatists made their mistakes, bad mistakes. Yes, they were foolish; and, worse, sin was involved. Yet they were struggling to reach out for New Testament church life. This is the point. The easiest way to avoid disputes in the church is doubtless to do as Perkins and many others did, and never deal with the issues of reform. At all events, when independent, thinking, spiritual men tried to recover New Testament church life, and tried to do it under very difficult conditions, it took a huge amount of grace to do it without falling apart. The pioneer Separatists just could not manage it. Even so, they made the attempt. All honour to them.

But in any case we find something similar in the New Testament itself. Paul found it necessary to write to the churches at Rome and Corinth who faced similar tensions among the members (Rom. 14; 15:1-7; 1 Cor. 8; 10:23-33). And, undeniably, the members of those churches got it wrong from time to time. But if there are no difficulties in a church, then it must be dead! There is no excuse for sin, but in a fallen world problems are inevitable when a church tries to get as close as it can to the New Testament. A graveyard is a very quiet place! Hence the need for the exhortation to church members, even in the New Testament:

*'Boiled Roots'*

To have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

Sadly, the early Separatists failed miserably in this respect. But they tried. And their work lived on. There were others who would take their place on the battle-front. The struggle for the recovery of the church was proving long and arduous, but the truth was gaining ground all the time. The first Separatists, for all their failures, had pressed home another thrust with the sword of the Spirit. They did not suffer and die in vain.

## *'The Wisest Fool in Christendom'*

Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them

Isaiah 1:23

*London, 1603 – Elizabeth dies – the state of the nation – James I – Puritan and Separatist hopes for reform – the king's professed Calvinism – his real position – Hampton Court Conference, 1604 – the King James Version of the Bible – defeat of Puritanism – Arminianism in the Church of England – Bancroft – the decline of Calvinism – Episcopacy enforced – many Puritans leave the State Church – all Separatists, including Anabaptists, persecuted – James swings back to Calvinism for a time – attack on the Lord's day – carnality in the Church of England – Villiers – the death of James – his end and funeral*

Elizabeth's long reign finally withered to its weary end in 1603. By then, the queen's popularity had evaporated and the nation had drifted down into apathy, the masses having become fed-up with the Tudor policy of absolute monarchy. The government's attitude had led to the State being ruled by a system rife with corruption, where bribery was commonplace among the ruling classes. Meanwhile, the ordinary folk were forced to eke out their miserable existence, locked into a cruel under-world far below the 'refined society' of the privileged. The everyday folk were consumed by a constant and losing struggle against the stark consequences of ignorance, pestilence and price-inflation. They woke every morning to face all over again the realities of hunger, relentless poverty and death. They longed for a change. They had endured more than enough of the Tudor queen.

Queen? Elizabeth was a despot who had treated her bishops and statesmen as mere puppets in order to gain her end, a main part of which was uniformity in religion, one all-embracing State Church. Opposition she would not tolerate at any price; this she kept subdued by the far-flung network of parish clergy who served as virtual State police informers, enabling the authorities to keep tabs on the disaffected. Puritans she hated nearly as much as Papists; worst of all were the Anabaptists. And she had few real friends, for while the Anglicans were content with her Settlement, they comprised the smaller part of the Church of England, most of whose members were not even converted! The vast majority of the people were simply enslaved by superstition. In addition, the queen had powerful political opponents in the House of Commons, where there was a majority

of Puritans against her. But all these difficulties made little or no difference to Elizabeth; by her own will she got her way! And, as I have already recognised, her realm prospered politically during her long reign, and she did develop a measure of popularity among the gentry and merchants, including some Puritans. At her end, however, the nation had grown generally tired of her. What is more, speaking spiritually and morally, she was a calamity. Vice was flagrant, her Court was profligate, the Elizabethan theatre was debauched, and cruelty was commonplace. There is some evidence that she herself had immoral tendencies. She was coarse and savage, she swore habitually, and she delighted in the barbaric pastime of baiting the bull and the bear.

In her last days, the Court grew increasingly irreligious, while she became slovenly in her habits, violent, obstinate and irrational. As she lay dying and speechless, she indicated that James of Scotland should succeed her on the throne. Then she forced her Archbishop to pray and pray and pray again until, being exhausted, she fell into a deep sleep from which she never recovered. She breathed her last on the 24th of March, 1603.

Thus James became the undisputed king of both England and Scotland, now James I of England as well as James VI of Scotland, over which kingdom he had already reigned for thirty-six years. He had mastered his realm north of the border, to the extent that in 1599 he had imposed bishops upon the State Church, even though it was of the Presbyterian order following the tenets of John Knox. But, on the death of Elizabeth, James now found himself Supreme Governor of the Church of England, a position which was to prove far more complicated. There were opportunities for good, true – but there were many perils also. These perils existed because the queen had suppressed her people for decades, especially in that she had not allowed them to entertain any hope of liberty of worship. Indeed, since she had reigned for the best part of half a century, very few of her subjects had ever known any other sovereign. The nation was like a furiously boiling pot – a pot whose lid was about to blow off. The changing times called for a wise, statesman-like king, one who could manage these difficult affairs with skill and diplomacy. Unfortunately, the mantle fell on James. The fearful responsibility of governing the nation was now his.

Nevertheless, it was a responsibility he welcomed with open arms; he was not in the least over-awed by his many duties. In fact, he boasted that he was ‘an old, experienced king, needing no lessons’. In fact, he was just short of forty. But, allowing his own description of himself, the adage proved true once again – there is no fool like an old fool. Millions would have to pay the price for the king’s folly and conceit.

Reader, to remind you, the Church of England in 1603 was, by the Elizabethan Settlement, an Episcopalian Church using the *Book of Common Prayer*, professing the Thirty-Nine Articles, and supposedly uniform in all its doctrine, order and practice, with that uniformity enforced by Parliament. But, for decades, there had been great unrest in the Church. In truth, it was grievously divided. Puritans of various persuasions wanted reform from within; Separatists were quitting the Church, calling it apostate; and, needless to say, those abominable Anabaptists were regarded as a perpetual nuisance from outside! Besides all this, the vast majority of the population, huge numbers of ungodly men and women, merely conformed and went through the mindless responses demanded by the authorities. In reality, they could not have cared less about the reform of the Church! The State Church was an utter shambles at the end of Elizabeth's reign.

The people generally wanted 'the new man'; they welcomed the end of the Tudor dynasty. Surely things could only improve. A decisive king was wanted to put the nation straight. James was the very man! The Puritans – especially the Presbyterians – looked forward to the death of Elizabeth and the coming of James to the throne, with high hopes that their aims would be furthered, if not met altogether under his rule. Doubtless a better day was dawning! The queen had attacked and practically silenced the Presbyterians, drawing their teeth, especially over the reform of the Church. But James was different. Or so they hoped. Those who worshipped outside the State Church too, or some of them, might cherish an expectation of an improvement under James, surely? Elizabeth had persecuted and banished the Separatists, many having died in prison – some on the gallows – while others had fled to Holland. All in all, things were bound to get better! They could not get worse – or could they?

To begin at the beginning: from childhood James had been brought up in Scotland where the State Church was Calvinistic and Presbyterian. Having been nurtured in the system of Knox, the king had condemned Episcopacy and, at the same time, praised Presbyterianism in clear, ringing tones. There was no doubting his credentials! In 1590, before the General Assembly in Edinburgh, he had uncovered his head, raised his hands and praised God that he was born in the time of the light of the gospel and in such a place, as to be king of such a Church. (Yes, he said it – 'king of' the Church! That is how he thought of himself). He solemnly asserted that in his opinion the Presbyterian Church in Scotland was 'the purest in the world', superior even to Geneva which was, he said, unbiblical in certain respects. As for the Anglican service, he had nothing but contempt for it! He declared:

The Church of Geneva keep Easter and Christmas; what have they for them? They have no [biblical warrant]. As for our neighbour the Church of England, their service is an evil-said Mass in English; they want nothing of the Mass but the liftings. I charge you, my good ministers, doctors, elders, nobles, gentlemen and barons, to stand to your purity, and to exhort the people to do the same; and I, forsooth, as long as I shall brook my life shall maintain the same.

Stirring words! No wonder that not only all the Puritans, especially the Presbyterians, but also some of the Separatists, expected great things of the new king, daring to hope that a better day had come. They felt they had good grounds for their aspirations. But, for all their Bible learning, they still did not seem to understand that the godly must not put their trust in princes, and vain is the help of man. They were wrong to look to man, and in their king they were to be grievously disappointed, and of their hopes they were destined to be quickly disabused. Their aspirations were ill-founded and futile. Once again, we see how Constantine, and not the New Testament, ruled men's minds on these matters – they trusted the welfare of the church to the kind offices of kings and politicians.

They should have known better. Whatever their convictions about 'Christian princes' – if they had only opened their eyes... The evidence was plain for all to see; James was quite prepared to say one thing, and do another. For example, though he had praised Presbyterianism while decrying the Church of England, even so he had imposed a measure of Episcopalianism in Scotland! Which half of the man was to be believed? Sadly, many vested totally unrealistic expectations in the coming Stuart, choosing perhaps not to read the health warning which came with him, hoping instead for the best. It was vain!

King James VI was an utter contradiction. On the one hand, for the majority of his life he was a professed Calvinist in doctrine; on the other, he was grossly carnal and had leanings towards Popery. As for his Calvinism, his words were clear enough. He was prepared to declare that 'predestination and election depend not upon any qualities, actions or works of man, which are mutable, but upon God, his eternal and immutable decree and purpose'. Again, he would write, even as late as 1619, that 'God draws by his effectual grace, out of that attainted and corrupt mass [of mankind], whom he pleases for the work of his mercy, leaving the rest to their own ways which all lead to perdition'. Excellent theology!

But, as we shall see, his way of life was in stark contrast to his professed faith. James was supposedly Calvinistic, yet he was grossly carnal. He divorced doctrine from practice, separated his creed from his conduct. Indeed, he set them at each other's throats. Publicly he was said to 'love and reverence many of the Puritans'; yet he could dismiss them in a

fit of rage, saying they were a ‘sect unable to be suffered in any well-governed commonwealth’.

How could he be so blatantly guilty of that degree of inconsistency? The answer is he had bigger fish to fry. At least, that is how it seemed to him. And once seated on the throne of England he quickly set about frying his fish, but in so doing he soon proved that he was the ‘wisest fool in Christendom’. The fact is, he loved power. He was a Stuart, and to make sure he exercised power he cultivated the besetting sin of the Stuarts; he was an inveterate liar. A word on oath simply meant nothing to him, nothing at all! He was merely an actor, and worse. In linking the names of Henry VIII and James VI as one-time heads of the Church of England, it has been sarcastically but rightly said that the Church ‘had already enjoyed the honour of having the grossest of voluptuaries for its Supreme head; it was now to enjoy the honour of having one of the greatest liars and drunkards of his age in the same position’. It was reported of James:

Early adept in... hypocrisy... a bold liar... early trained to dissimulation, by the time he was sixteen his mastery in this despicable art was entire. No motive had power to influence him which did not touch his personal gratification or selfish interest... Few trusted his professions.

Unfortunately, many of the Puritans did ‘trust his professions’, at least for a while, being deceived by his earlier claims in Scotland and his love of theological debate. But his real interest did not lie in theology, nor in the recovery of the New Testament church. It was power, absolute power as a king, which James craved. He was convinced, and had been so for years, that it was the will of God he should reign with unquestioned authority. Indeed, he looked upon his kingly power as sacred, so that any resistance to his rule was nothing less than a sin in his eyes! He had long envied Elizabeth’s tyranny over the bishops and pulpits of England. He had suffered too much – in his opinion – under the Calvinistic preachers of Scotland, and he had heard more than enough of men like Andrew Melville, John Ross and David Black, men who were prepared to address him plainly, declaring that:

He was only God’s silly vassal... Admit that our king be a Christian king... but... he is a reprobate king. Of all men in this nation, the king himself is the... most dissembling hypocrite... All kings were children of the devil; but... in Scotland the head of the Court was Satan himself... There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is Christ Jesus, and his kingdom is the kirk, whose subject King James VI is, and of his kingdom not a king nor a head nor a lord, but a member.

James retorted that these ministers and their like were ‘snivelling knaves’, going as far as to say that ‘Scots Presbytery agrees with monarchy as well as God and the devil’. He so much envied Elizabeth’s grip over the

Episcopal Church of England that, when he got his hands on it in 1603, there was not the slightest chance that he would let it go. After all, he was of the decided opinion that ‘bishops should rule the Church, and the king rule both’. No miserable preacher would be allowed to stand in his way or question his right to rule. Years before, a poverty-ridden preacher, Gibson by name, had been hauled before the king in Scotland to answer for his ‘treasonable preaching’. The faithful man explained that he had simply applied lessons from the apostasy of Joash as recorded in 2 Chronicles 24. The Jewish king had forsaken the ways of God and killed the prophets who reproved him, thus bringing God’s judgements upon himself and his house. ‘So should the king if he continue in that cursed course’, said the faithful Gibson. James merely roared with laughter. Despising the poor starved minister arraigned before him, he dismissed him, yelling: ‘I give not a turd for your preaching!’ That was James VI of Scotland. That was a supposed Calvinist speaking!

Reader, is not King James a standing warning to us? It is possible to profess the gospel with our lips, and yet our hearts to be far from God (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8). We can very easily drive a wedge between our doctrine and our way of life. We can argue staunchly for the truth, yet fall far short of it in actual daily practice. Which of us is entirely clear in this matter? But when all is said and done – and, as it has been pointed out, more is said than done – it is our lives which speak; they are far more eloquent than our lips. Even the natural man realises that actions speak louder than words. Scripture is very plain. Believing wives, for instance, are to seek to win their unbelieving husbands by their behaviour, even if they will not listen to the word (1 Pet. 3:1-2). By our good conduct, not merely by our good professions, we must compel men to ask a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15-16). We glorify our heavenly Father when we let our light so shine before men that they can see our good works, not when we force them to make do merely with our good talk (Matt. 5:16). Words are cheap. In fact, if our life does not match our words, we are an offence to God and a source of harm to his church. We hinder others by our miserable contradictory ways. Isaac Watts hit the nail on the head when he wrote:

*So let our lips and lives express  
The holy gospel we profess;  
So let our works and virtues shine,  
To prove the doctrine all divine.*

Paul forged the link between doctrine and practice – a link which must never be broken. He wrote: ‘You have carefully followed my doctrine, [my] manner of life...’ (2 Tim. 3:10). The true believer will have a ‘desire to live godly in Christ Jesus’ (2 Tim. 3:12). I recall reading that Luther was once asked, by one of his students, I believe, if it was possible for a

believer to go to a brothel, was it allowed? ‘Do you *want* to?’, Luther retorted. Reader, the ‘all things (which) have become new’ (2 Cor. 5:17) at regeneration, will certainly include new desires. We must desire to be godly. If we are regenerate, we will want to be holy, and there will be a sanctifying process going on in our lives. We must grow in grace (2 Pet. 3:18). It is God’s will that we should be sanctified (1 Thess. 4:3).

Our godliness has to be more than lip-deep. Alas, it is altogether too easy to have a form of godliness but to deny its power (2 Tim. 3:5), to make a profession without living the reality. It is, of course, an excellent thing to profess godliness, but good works have to match the fine words (1 Tim. 2:10). Faith is to be demonstrated in good works, otherwise it is ‘dead’ (Jas. 2:14-26). ‘Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom’ (Jas. 3:13). Timothy was exhorted to ‘be an example to the believers in word’; but not only ‘in word’ – ‘in conduct’ also (1 Tim. 4:12). ‘Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine’, he was told (1 Tim. 4:16). He had to ‘continue in them’ both. Both! If we are hearers of the word but not doers of it, we deceive ourselves (Jas. 1:22-27). God elected us to holiness and good works (Eph. 1:4; 2:8-10). He bought us with the precious blood of Christ, he washed us, set us apart and justified us, and he has given us his Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must glorify God in our body and in our spirit; they belong to God, we were bought at a price. We must shun sin in our lives since God dwells in us by his Holy Spirit. His *Holy Spirit!* (1 Cor. 6:11-20).

We are commanded to ‘fear the LORD, serve him in sincerity and in truth’; if we do, this will show itself in a practical effect in our lives (Josh. 24:14). Paul prayed that his readers might be sincere (Phil. 1:10). It is only the pure in heart who will see God (Matt. 5:8) and this inward purity will prove itself in outward and visible ‘holiness, without which no one will see the Lord’ (Heb. 12:14). Sadly and sinfully, King James VI fell far short of this standard. He did not follow the clear example he had been set by godly kings before him – kings of the calibre of David (1 Kings 3:6) and Josiah (2 Kings 23:24-25). He ought to have done. But, reader, so ought we in our smaller stations in life! Is there anything more fearful than to have the precious doctrines of the gospel spoken by profane lips? It is as incongruous ‘as a ring of gold in a swine’s snout’ (Prov. 11:22). What a contradiction, Calvinism professed by those who live carnal lives. How grotesque! What damage is done to the cause of Christ in that way. Let us be consistent and live up to the truth we own.

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Although the king's reputation for duplicity had gone before him, nevertheless, Archbishop Whitgift, chief among the politicians and bishops, was wide-awake as Elizabeth drew near to her death. The Anglican authorities dreaded a Presbyterian king in England, and were determined to prevent it at all costs. They would take no chances. They feared the Puritans might get their way with James. Elizabeth had been a clever politician who successfully kept the rebels in some sort of order, but what of this man from the north? How would he cope with the trouble-makers?

The bishops need not have worried. Nevertheless, they played their part with consummate skill in their early approaches to the king, offering him generous promises and framing the kind of arguments which would appeal to him. He responded most favourably. He was easy to please and readily persuaded of the maxim 'no bishop, no king'. He knew it was not merely a question of church government, it was a question of kingcraft. Nobody was going to fix a bridle on him! bishops were better friends than presbyters to a power-hungry king and he said so, bluntly. He had chafed too long under argumentative, critical presbyters in Scotland, and now he had more than a passing fancy for pliable, political bishops whom he could manipulate. He showed he was prepared 'to go half-way to meet' those Puritans whom 'he loved and reverenced' – but only as long as they gave up their ideas of Presbyterianism! If they would agree to that... why... then he would make some of them bishops, even going as far as to dangle 'the best bishoprics' before their eyes. But James had no intention of setting up Presbyterianism in England. He dismissed it, saying:

Jack and Tom and Will and Dick shall meet, and at their pleasure censure me and my Council, and all our proceedings: then Will shall stand up and say, it must be thus; then Dick shall reply and say, nay... but we will have it thus.

James became an Episcopalian simply because it enabled him to exercise that form of absolute power which he so much loved. The truth is, the bishops and the king had a mutual interest; if they served each other well, and promoted their respective ends at the expense of the Puritans, they would keep each other in power. Consequently, the liar-king would defend Episcopacy, and the ambitious prelates would support the monarchy in return. It was nothing other than a political bargain, favourable to both sides. They fully understood each other. 'The prelates accepted him with devout gratitude. The more his character became revealed to them the greater appeared to be their satisfaction'.

But clear warning signs were there at the start of his reign, if only James and the Church bigwigs had heeded them. England had had enough of absolute Tudor rule. The Stuart king inherited a wonderful opportunity to govern wisely and well, but the trouble was he was anything but wise!

To put it bluntly, he was a fool. Typical of his bigoted stupidity was his view that men could no more question his actions than they could the acts of God! God's powers and the king's powers are alike, he declared, so that neither God nor the king are accountable to any. Absolute obedience to both is demanded and expected, he roundly asserted. James loved the kind of preaching which bolstered his blasphemous notions, and assured him that to fear God and to fear the king were one and the same fear.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the word of James and not the word of God ruled the people, with the result that under this son of Lord Darnley – himself a drunken, decadent man – the Court became ‘a nursery of lust and intemperance’. James demanded money, money to spend or to waste as he pleased, which he lavished on worthless favourites, squandering vast sums in the process. He encouraged bribery, and engaged in a shameless trade in offices and honours. He was a coarse man, undoubtedly perverted with homosexual tendencies, openly fawning on and embracing ‘his pretty boys’ – or Candy Captains as they were called – men who were his intimates at Court. He never washed, he gobbled his food, he was a veritable drunken clown. He was vulgar and obscene, adept in cracking bawdy, blasphemous jests with ecclesiastics. When out with the hunt, he would relieve himself from the saddle; the filthy stench was abominable. At the killing of a stag, the great passion of his life, he would slit the creature’s belly in order to plunge his feet and legs into the hot blood. At this display of kingly culture, the proper question was asked: Who is the brute – the king or the stag? Such was the stamp of the man who became the head of the Anglican Church and State in the early 17th century. In short, this atrocious man was a miserable failure as the king of England. But Holland and America have much to thank him for!

When James became king in 1603, his first act was to ask the Privy Council for money. Money! He was eager to get his fingers on his new-found wealth, having fretted under the privations imposed by his frugal kingdom in Scotland. Money, as just noted – or rather, the spending of it – was a marked characteristic of his English reign. The expense he lavished on Elizabeth’s funeral, following which, the cost of his coronation, along with other associated displays of opulence, were but the start of a long catalogue of waste. He simply had no idea of money – except to squander it. His wife, Anne of Denmark, apart from her papist leanings and stupid meddlings in politics, lived for little else than the love of extravagance in clothes and jewels. Nor was it only waste that the pair indulged in; they lavished their wealth on *sinful* activities. As an example of their gross ways, take the time when James and the king of Denmark were regaled at a

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Ahab’s attitude to the false prophets, with his attitude to the true man of God, Micaiah (1 Kings 22).

feast. The drunken company was ‘entertained’ by a blasphemous pantomime based on the biblical account of Solomon and the queen of Sheba. I forbear to give further details, except to say that, as on other of these State occasions, the king proved he could out-drink all and sundry, and still stay on his feet, his courtiers ‘staggering and spewing’ around him. In short, since his wretched reign was marked throughout by this kind of decadence, it was doomed before it began. But in 1603 all this lay hidden in the future, albeit thinly veiled.

To go back to the start of his reign: The Puritans took the first opportunity which presented itself to press their cause. At once they approached the king with a Petition – the Millenary Petition – signed by eight hundred and twenty-five ministers. Hence ‘Millenary’, nearly a thousand. In this Petition, which was presented to the king in April, 1603, as he travelled south, the Puritans were certainly restrained in their demands. Although they were by this time more numerous than during the earlier years of the reign of Elizabeth, they had become less trenchant, less searching in their calls for reform. They had become moderates. They were easy meat for James! He had cut his teeth on harder material in Scotland, and conquered. True, the Puritans wanted reforms, including the removal of superstitions from the Prayer Book, the end of corruptions such as vestments and the wedding ring, the observance of the Lord’s day to be better enforced, and the establishment of training for the improvement of preachers. They also wanted more Calvinism, real discipline within the Church and the end of pluralities. Nonetheless they did not press for a full reformation of the Church, nor was there any call for Presbyterianism. Nor did they attack the royal Supremacy over the Church.

James responded by calling a Conference in January, 1604 – the Hampton Court Conference – ostensibly ‘for the hearing, and for the determining, things pretended to be amiss in the Church’. It was to be a Conference between the Anglicans and the Puritans, with James, who was widely credited with scholarship and who fancied his theological skill, in the chair. Various bishops, the two Archbishops and certain deans and others appeared for the Anglicans; while four Puritans, headed by Dr John Reynolds of Oxford, spoke on the other side.

The Conference was no conference at all; it was a veritable sham and quickly over, lasting only four days. In fact, it was never intended to reconcile Anglicans and Puritans. Its purpose was to get rid of the trouble-makers! The decisions had all been taken beforehand. The Puritans were not even allowed to be present on the first day – when the real business was done! James showed that he had no sympathy with them, despite granting them a few minor concessions. He also agreed to a new, authorised translation of the Bible. In truth, this was the only good to come

of the Conference. But even this needs qualification. The resolution for it read:

That a translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek; and this to be set out and [punctuated], without any marginal notes, and only to be used in all Churches of England in time of divine service.

The King James Version was never authorised by Parliament, nor by the Church. Nor was it, as some think, authorised by God! The proposal for it came from the Puritan, Reynolds, but was opposed by the Anglicans, especially Bancroft, who complained that ‘if every man’s humour were followed, there would be no end of translating’. Even so, James latched on to the idea. His eyes lit up. In his vanity, he saw and seized the golden opportunity to get rid of the Geneva Bible with its marginal notes which were far too Reformed for his taste. He declared: ‘I could never yet see a Bible well translated in English; but I think that, of all, that of Geneva is the worst’. The opposite is, in fact, the truth since the Geneva Bible was the best translation in English at the time. It was the Geneva notes James really objected to. He bluntly asserted that some of them were ‘very partial, untrue, seditious, and savouring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits’. Translated into plain English, he meant the notes were too critical of his sinful way of life. But the king had foreseen, however dimly, the very important part the Genevan notes would play in the reign of his son.

What is more, in one respect James was right. The Bible should be printed free of notes, notes which form a commentary. A few essential explanatory remarks are one thing, but to have a commentary bound with the Bible is wrong. Some Bibles are bound with glosses of this nature today. They ought not to be.

The so-called, but mis-called, Authorised Version, when duly produced, was seen to be based on the bishops’ Bible, and was not a new version or translation at all, 90% of it being Tyndale’s version. But one of its main drawbacks arose out of James’ stipulation that the old ecclesiastical words must be brought back, words which had – and still have – a papist overtone. This was deliberate. The aim was to get a halfway house between the Puritans and the Papists. In the ‘Preface for the Reader’ the translators were quite open about it when they wrote:

We have on the one side avoided the scrupulosity of the Puritans, who leave the old ecclesiastical words, and betake them to other... as also on the other side we have shunned the obscurity of the Papists.

This is noteworthy. The Anglicans regarded the Puritans as scrupulous, ‘conscientious or thorough even in small matters, careful to avoid doing

wrong'. They meant it as an insult, it goes without saying. The Puritans were 'over-attentive to details', they declared. The Papists, on the other hand, were said to be 'obscure'. Is that all that was wrong with the Papists?

Even as it saw the light of day, the Authorised Version was immediately pounced upon by its critics, and attacked by them, many of whom still opted for the Geneva Bible. As a consequence, from 1611 the two versions ran alongside each other. The Geneva Bible, the Bible preferred by the Calvinists, had been produced in 1560 by the Marian exiles; the New Testament having come out three years before. It had gone through many editions, and, having been laid out with a wide circulation in mind, it maintained its long-held popularity for many years, managing to survive despite attempts to suppress it after the production of the Authorised Version. One ruse was to have the Geneva printed in the Low Countries with the false date of 1599 – so as to avoid falling foul of the 1611 watershed. The Puritans were not only against the translation provided by the King James Version, they also objected strongly to the fact that the Apocrypha was included with the official Bible, and that it was made illegal to omit it. James, it seems, felt more at home with the Apocrypha than the Reformed notes from Geneva.

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To return to the Hampton Court Conference: James openly showed his resolution against the Puritans and reform of the Church. Looking – glowering, no doubt – at Reynolds, he demanded: 'Well, doctor, have you anything else to say?'

'No more, if it please your Majesty'.

'If this be all your party has to say, I will make them conform themselves, or I will harry them out of the land, or else do worse', came the sneering reply. It was no idle threat. 'I will have one doctrine, one discipline, one religion, in substance, in ceremony', he declared. And he meant it.

The Anglicans loved every word of it; they could breathe easy. So James had no intention of weakening the Elizabethan Settlement after all. No! He would continue to enforce its precepts and ensure uniformity, with the help of his prelates. They gladly responded. The more he drivelled, the more they expressed their heartfelt amazement and gratitude. They assured him that he had spoken by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit! This was a *quid pro quo* – James had earlier praised them for their abuse of the Puritans. Now, Richard Bancroft, soon to be Archbishop, quickly fell upon his knees exclaiming:

*'The Wisest Fool in Christendom'*

My heart melts within me for joy, as, doubtless, do the hearts of the whole company, and I praise Almighty God for his singular mercy, that he has given us such a king, as since Christ's time the like has not been seen!

The 'Dedication to the king' at the front of the Authorised Version amply reflects this grovelling attitude. The hatred the Anglicans felt for the Puritans is barely disguised. It reads in part:

Great and manifold were the blessings... which Almighty God... bestowed upon us the people of England, when first he sent Your Majesty's Royal Person to rule and reign over us. For whereas it was the expectation of many... that upon the setting of that bright... Star, Queen Elizabeth of most happy memory, some thick... clouds of darkness would... have overshadowed this Land, that men should have been in doubt which way they were to walk; and that it should hardly be known, who was to direct this unsettled State; the appearance of your Majesty, as the Sun in his strength, instantly dispelled those supposed and surmised mists, and gave unto all that were well affected exceeding cause of comfort... But among all our joys, there was no one that more filled our hearts, than the blessed continuance of the preaching of God's sacred Word among us... and to continue it in that state, wherein the famous Predecessor of Your Highness did leave it: nay, to go forward... is that which hath so bound and firmly knit the hearts of all Your Majesty's loyal and religious people unto You, that Your very name is precious among them: their eye doth behold You with comfort, and they bless You in their hearts, as that sanctified Person, who, under God, is the immediate Author of their true happiness... so that if, on the one side, we shall be traduced by popish Persons... or if, on the other side, we shall be maligned by self-conceited Brethren, who run their own ways, and give liking unto nothing, but what is framed by themselves, and hammered on their anvil...

It is not difficult to see who the 'self-conceited Brethren' were!

Moreover, it was not only an exercise in mutual flattery between the king and the Anglicans which was taking place at Hampton Court. Without doubt, the theology of the Church of England was changing radically at the time, keeping in step with the Arminianism which was now rearing its ugly head throughout Europe. One Dr John Overall spoke at Hampton Court on behalf of the Anglicans, and propounded what amounted to Arminianism, when he verged towards the possibility that the elect could fall away. James was easily persuaded of this doctrine, and said that 'the necessary certainty of standing and persisting in grace entails a dangerous presumption'. So much for the professed Calvinism of James! Bancroft encouraged the king in this heretical view. There was no hope of more Calvinism in the Church of England. It was going to be abolished!

Dr Overall would later develop his arguments. Holding that Christ's redemption was universal, the Anglican theologian would come to assert that 'Christ died for all, that is, for every [single] man in the world... God

gave his Son for the world or the whole human race... men can resist the divine call and influence by their free will'. Overall found support for his views in the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Prayer Book. It is said that 'he destroyed the case of the Calvinist Puritans', and that he contributed to the 'eclipse of high Calvinism'.<sup>2</sup> We may allow ourselves a smile at this – it is a relief to be able to say that Calvinism was not destroyed in the early 1600s! But the fact is, Whitgift had already steered the Church of England to the middle path between free grace and free will, and that always means Arminianism in the end.

Reader, beware of those who say that the Calvinism-Arminianism question is not an issue today, that it is irrelevant. The opposite is the case. This question lies at the very heart of the gospel. Nor is there any halfway house between the two. Arminianism is frankly unscriptural, it is destructive of the gospel and its tendencies are abominable. The Puritans rightly saw it in its true colours, even as the handmaid of Popery. It will be recalled that Perkins had declared the same at Cambridge in the 1590s. One Puritan in a speech to Parliament in 1629 would claim that Arminianism was a Trojan horse. He went on:

I desire that we may look into the very belly and bowels of this Trojan horse, to see if there be not in it men ready to open the gates of Romish tyranny... for an Arminian is the spawn of a Papist... you will see an Arminian reaching out his hand to a Papist; a Papist to a Jesuit; a Jesuit gives one hand to the pope...

Just to say for those who are not aware of the detailed points of the Arminian controversy and the refutation of it at the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619, I will come back to the subject in a later chapter, and deal with it a little more fully then. The fact is, James – a professed Calvinist dabbling with Arminianism – was like a child playing with matches in the middle of a very dry forest. The fire would catch. It would spread, though slowly at first. But, by the 1620s, it would be well-alight. And that would lead to what? As one historian put it, the fact 'that religion became an issue in the Civil War crisis [was] due primarily to the rise of Arminianism in the 1620s'. To change the figure: In 1604, James sowed the wind; forty years later, millions reaped the whirlwind.

The reason is this: Until the first years of the 17th century, the majority of ministers were Calvinistic, and the same could be said of the educated classes outside the ministry. Of course, it is true that among those who quitted the State Church – that is, the various Anabaptists, the Lutherans and some of the Separatists – anti-predestinarian views did hold limited sway. But, by the time of Hampton Court, the Church of England had been

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<sup>2</sup> For my views on 'high' Calvinism, see my *The Gospel Offer is Free; Particular Redemption and The Free Offer*; *Septimus Sears*.

overwhelmingly Calvinistic in doctrine for more than half a century. In all that time, the many debates, the doctoral theses published at Oxford, the books printed by the licensed presses, and the preambles to wills, make it clear that Calvinism was the orthodox doctrine of the State Church. There were notable exceptions, of course, Elizabeth herself being the most notable! Yet the truth is, however much Presbyterians, Anglicans and Puritans, might disagree on various matters – and disagree strongly – on the scriptural truth of Calvinism, they were largely united. On vestments, on worship, on church government, on preaching, on discipline, on the Prayer Book, they were at loggerheads. On Calvinistic doctrine, they were one. You will recall that in an earlier chapter we looked at the vigorous debates between Whitgift and Cartwright. But even those two protagonists were reconciled, partly through their bond of Calvinism, by the 1590s.

The point I am making is that James and his bishops were indeed playing with fire when they introduced Arminianism into the Church of England during the early years of the 17th century, and then encouraged its spread. In so doing, they were in reality making a massive contribution to the outbreak of the Civil Wars four decades later. They were storing up trouble with a capital T. The truth is, they were starting a revolution, a revolution so great it is almost beyond our ability to comprehend. English society had been largely governed by Calvinistic ideas for years, but now Arminianism was introduced into its highest reaches. The thinking of society was to be turned on its head, and the whole fabric of that society was to be shaken and ripped asunder. And the Church would be in the middle of it.

Thus various strands came together at Hampton Court – the developing Arminian and semi-papist views of the Anglican theologians, the love of absolute power by the Stuart King James, and the political intrigues of his grovelling bishops. These strands united to form a rope with which to strangle Puritanism within the Church of England, so that ‘the Puritans [were] unfairly treated, browbeaten, jeered at, silenced’ in 1604. As stated above, there never was a chance that the Hampton Court Conference could ever reconcile the Puritans and the Anglicans. As Lloyd-Jones rightly summed it up: ‘Very little came out of this Conference because the leaders of the Anglican Church, who were now becoming Arminian in doctrine in spite of the Thirty-Nine Articles, were utterly opposed to the Puritans and their teaching’.

Nor was it merely a defeat for the Puritans as a party. England paid a very dear price for it; all England, not only the Puritans! James and the Anglicans wanted the Church of England rid of Puritanism, and both he and they set about it with a will, thereby sowing the seeds of a life-and-death struggle between an absolute monarchy and the common people. As

the next forty years ground on, ‘no bishop, no king’ would take on a terrifying aspect. The State and the Church would become more and more locked in each other’s arms, Parliament would be abolished, an archbishop and a king would each lose his head, and the people would be plunged into the three Civil Wars.

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After Hampton Court, the king’s hatred of the Puritans reached fever-pitch. Having dealt with the ministers at the Conference, he now turned his attention to Parliament which had many Presbyterian members – whom he despised – deriding them as ‘the pack of Puritans that overrule the Lower House’. In the Court, he saw to it that the Puritans were treated with contempt and scorn, ‘hated, disgraced and reviled’, and he promoted those who would preach against them and flatter his pride. The common people took advantage of this open attack upon the Puritans, who soon became the butt of jokes, the subject of ribald songs. The theatre poured profanities upon them. The ungodly loved it.

It will be no surprise to learn that Calvinism rapidly gave way to Arminianism during the reign of James. How could it be otherwise? A tale was told of ‘a simple country man [who] asked a minister what the Arminians held. The wag replied that they held all the best positions in the Church of England!’ And from Arminianism it was a natural step, and a short one, to Popery. The Court itself showed popish tendencies as James connived at papist missionaries coming into England; he even used one as his own personal tutor in Italian. Secret treaties were made with the Papacy, and the Papists humoured the king and queen in their sinful lusts, all the time working steadily against the Puritans. James, intoxicated with grandiose ideas of the Constantine order, planned a General Council with the pope, intending to unite the Continent under one Church. To bring this about he said:

I would with all my heart give my consent that the Bishop of Rome should have the first seat... [go] as near the Roman form as lawfully can be done, for it hath ever been my way to go with the Church of Rome.

In this matter James seemed to show, for once, a measure of consistency. Years before, in Scotland, Jesuits had attended his Court as his Romish tendencies had been nurtured in secret. He had gone as far as to propose that Scottish ports should be open to papist Spain to help in the invasion of England. Yet even in this dabbling with Popery, James contradicted himself, as we shall see. It must be remembered that his one settled policy was to retain power. That took precedence over all else. To accomplish this

he was willing to play off Papists against Puritans, always cultivating any party that would maintain his authority.

Alive to the opportunity which the fiasco of Hampton Court gave him, Bancroft – now Archbishop – immediately set about the implementation of the policy of the king ‘to harry the Puritans out of the land, or worse’. By this, Richard Bancroft played a very important part in the miserable descent into the Civil Wars, paving the way for Laud, of whom more will be said. In the coming years, William Laud would unleash a fanatical onslaught against all who dared to refuse conformity to the Church of England, but in the early 1600s Bancroft showed what could be done. In particular, he launched a fresh attack upon the Separatists, revealing a bitter intolerance of them. He loathed all facets of Puritanism, even to the extent of a rage which verged on madness. Indeed, it was his well-known severity against Puritans during Elizabeth’s time which made James choose him for high office.

Bancroft was one of the first leading Churchman to espouse Arminianism, and in so doing he threw off all restraint in putting into practice his views on church government. In this way, under his archbishopric during the years 1604-1610, the doctrine and practice of Episcopacy was forged into a cast-iron dogma for the Church of England, and its tenets were enforced with vigour. During earlier days, even as late as the debates between Cartwright and Whitgift in the 1570s, the Anglicans had looked upon Episcopacy as a thing indifferent, an open question. It was only in 1588 that Bancroft, then Whitgift’s chaplain, first proposed the view that bishops were a different order to presbyters or elders (priests, he called them) and superior to them. It was no longer a thing indifferent, Bancroft asserted. He declared it was heresy to deny Episcopacy. Whitgift liked the sound of it yet could not bring himself to believe it, he said. But in 1604, Bancroft, now in power, was able to put into effect what he had long believed. Consequently, the claim was made that Episcopacy is ‘essential and indispensable’ to the existence of the church, that ‘without it there could be no church at all’. In July, 1604 – a mere six months after Hampton Court – by means of new Canons, a stricter conformity was enforced upon ministers, about three hundred of whom refused. But the resentment went far deeper and wider than the three hundred.

However, notwithstanding this turning of the screw against them, many Puritans still persisted in their mistaken policy of conformity, though under duress, within the Church of England, despite the fact that James showed them that England was no place for them and their children, that they were not wanted in these islands! On the other hand, many would not conform themselves. The king was as good as his word in this instance, for a stream of Puritan exiles of all persuasions, especially Separatists, left the country

because of the persecution. As just one example, some Separatists in the East Midlands – of whom more in the next chapter – were persecuted and tormented without respite. Of them it was reported:

They could not long continue in any peaceable condition, but were hunted and persecuted on every side. Some were taken and clapped up in prison, others had their houses beset and watched night and day, and hardly escaped their hands; and the most were fain to fly and leave their houses and their habitations and the means of their livelihood.

The Anabaptists were not forgotten in the onslaught. Indeed, they fared worst of all. One of them, Edward Wightman, was burned alive at Lichfield as late as May, 1612.

However, yet once again, James proved himself a contradiction. He even restrained Bancroft to a certain extent, despite the fact that he was carrying out his sovereign's policy. Furthermore, in 1611, following Bancroft's death, James went as far as to appoint George Abbot as Archbishop, a man who was certainly more sympathetic to the Puritans than his predecessor. Abbot's outlook is revealed by the Jesuits' hatred of him as 'a brutal and fierce man, a sworn enemy of the very name of Catholic'.

Why was it that James leant back towards the Puritans and promoted Abbot? The truth is, the king at that time had fears of Popery. Indeed, for some years government bigwigs had been calling for more Puritan preachers to put a stop to the spread of Popery, especially in the north of England. Popish intrigues were abroad, and the memory of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 was even now very much alive in high places. The government might be overthrown by a Catholic rebellion at any time. That is why James, for a while, became more sympathetic to the Puritan cause. They served his purpose. But, as I have indicated, these moves must not be taken to mean that James really loved Puritanism. It was just another chapter in the same old story; divide and conquer. James used Archbishop Abbot to keep Puritanism tamed; and useful.

James was not out of the wood, however. By 1618, the climate had altered yet again. Now there was even talk of a Spanish bride for the Prince of Wales, later to be crowned King Charles I. If this should materialise, it would mean another reversal of James' policy, and he would be forced to move against the Puritans again, as he now would have to be seen to support Popery. But fortunately, as he saw it, he was helped by a timely political upheaval in the Low Countries. Because of this, he was able to keep up the pretence of his Calvinism for a little while longer. The Arminian controversy had broken out in Holland, and the political parties got involved in it as they struggled for power. This political struggle dragged theology down into the quagmire, typical of the ways of

Constantine adherents. But all the same, it did prove a life-line to James, who sent delegates to the Synod of Dort, the assembly called to settle the dispute. The published findings of the Synod against Arminianism were even dedicated to King James. Thus, once again, he was nimble enough to avert a catastrophe by means of selective and judicious encouragement of the ‘right’ people at the ‘right’ time. On this occasion, it was the Calvinists who received his ‘favours’!

All this was a spiritual disaster. What is more, it was only a temporary ‘success’, even in the political realm, for it helped to lead to the Civil Wars. And it needs to be said again, the machinations of princes and their intrigues have no place in the government and life of the church. The church is not the lap-dog of kings! Believers should resist all contamination of the church by politicians; they should have nothing to do with their schemes. The gospel is not advanced, it is not served, by Christians trying to do Christ’s works with Caesar’s weapons. Quite the reverse. It was yet another sad chapter in the long history of Constantine theories imposed upon the church. We never seem to get clear of it!

While all this was going on, James introduced the *Book of Sports* in 1617-18 to enforce the old-style of English Sunday with morris dancing, archery, along with various other games and sports, to follow morning worship. This was a direct attack upon the Puritan Sabbatarian concept of the Lord’s day. James gave two reasons for his policy. Ridiculous reasons they were, too. If Sunday was too austere then Papists would not be converted, he said. And if the people enjoyed sports on Sundays, it would keep the men fit in case of war!

Reader, there is an application of this attack upon the Lord’s day and spiritual worship which is of the utmost relevance for us. How times have changed! Today, many evangelicals use the king’s first argument or something very like it to *justify* their practices. At least it was *imposed* on the church from outside in 1617! Services must be bright, they say. We must make church services attractive to sinners, otherwise they will not attend and be converted, we are told. Preaching must not be too severe, Christianity must be made easy and palatable, ‘user-friendly’ towards unbelievers. What! Unbelievers ‘use’ the church? What an idea!

It is abundantly plain in Scripture that there is nothing we can do to make the gospel attractive to the natural man. It is readily agreed that dullness and heaviness and all the rest of it, are wrong, but there is nothing we can do to enable the natural man to enjoy spiritual worship, since ‘the carnal mind is enmity against God’ (Rom. 8:7). In our generation, many churches have ‘gone one better’ than James in that they have made the very Lord’s day services bright by various ‘sports’ and ‘side-shows’, and it is nothing less than an abomination. At least James brought in his ‘sports’

after the services! Furthermore, all attempts at bribery to make sinners ‘feel at home’ in meetings of the church – and they are legion these days – are doomed to end in disaster. They run counter to the gospel.

As an illustration of the point, we know that Paul was concerned that the church should maintain its spirituality so that if an unbeliever happened to come in he might be convicted by the evident demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, disorder would make the unbeliever feel the church was a madhouse (1 Cor. 14:23-25). Those who adopt carnal methods in the church have really turned Scripture on its head. The New Testament churches did not use worldly methods to attract sinners to services. Sinners ought to feel most uncomfortable under the gospel, they ought to hate it – until they are converted.

Things have reached a sorry state in numerous churches at the present time. We are going downhill at a frightening speed because of a careless, casual, weak-willed attitude to church life on the part of many professing Christians, especially those in positions of responsibility. Not a few Christians are acting carnally, ‘like mere men’ of the world (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Many have opened their arms to paganism. The world with its wicked ways now holds the reins and dictates what goes on in many churches – churches which once stood stoutly against all encroachments by the enemy. The world is now asked for its opinions. What would it like to see in our churches? How can we oblige it? In what ways can we make it attractive for pagans? The church apes the world; it tries to be more worldly than the world itself.

We have churches where men dress up as women, where a pizza is fried to illustrate the gospel, where a ventriloquist’s dummy mouths holy words, where puppets preach, where the minister dresses as a clown, where cake-decoration classes are used to preach the gospel... What have we come to? One ‘evangelical’ pastor was quite open about it – he even went into newsprint to say he would like his church to be ‘a cross between a disco and a pub’, as he put it. That same church opened a shop ‘stocking it with creative toys, rather than Bibles’. Why? It ‘is all part of an attempt to change the public image of the church’, the pastor explained. He said that ‘people are after kicks and exuberance. They certainly haven’t found that in the church. Nothing is more predictable than a church service... there is a healthy spirit now running through the churches’, he was sure. This set-up is proving very attractive, he claimed, the church being ‘filled with young couples, who dance as they worship’.

What all this amounts to can be put very simply. The church and the world are now one and the same thing. There is nothing to distinguish them. You do not need to be regenerate to enjoy ‘a cross between a disco and a pub’. Undoubtedly, sinners might get ‘kicks’ in such a church, but

whether they will hear preaching of the gospel which will bring them to conviction of sin, repentance and faith is a much more doubtful proposition. God in his sovereignty might be very gracious and bless despite the goings-on, but that is no excuse for our carnality. Reader, we are sowing the wind; we shall reap the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7).

Nor are these isolated incidents. No, not by any means. We are seeing a break-down in church life – not merely of traditional values, I hasten to add – we are seeing an assault on the biblical principles which must govern the churches of Christ. And the break-down is rapid. The consequences will be fearsome. Will be? The signs are already here.

Such churches, such pastors, are not serving the Lord Christ, whatever they profess. They are serving ‘their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple’ (Rom. 16:18). The word ‘belly’ means the pleasures of the palate, gluttony, then appetite, self-interest. Men who behave like this are serving themselves. They are yielding to their own interests, appetites and tastes. Exactly so. It is shameful and at enmity with Christ. Destruction awaits them. See also Philippians 3:17-19 and Jeremiah 5:30-31. In a large number of churches today, these words are a very fair and apt description of what lies below the surface, and not so very far down at that. The church exists to serve the tastes and appetites of men, not to promote the glory and service of the Lord Christ. And professing Christians ‘love to have it so’. The church has become a glorified club. Glorified? It is often a tawdry, second-rate imitation of the world. Worldlings know how to run carnal activities far better than Christians. They ought to. They are carnal men. Christians are spiritual men.

But that does not stop plenty of churches having a go at being as worldly as pagans. All palates are catered for. Those with a musical taste are served by the various performances of the choirs, ensembles, soloists, orchestras, bands and groups. The artistic element can enjoy themselves with presentations of drama, mime, illusions and such like. Those with an inclination towards catering have a field day with all the meals, coffee mornings and various refreshments which have to be seen to. The athletic types get involved in a variety of games and sports, with a full panoply of the necessary equipment. Gardeners look forward to the annual produce display, euphemistically called a ‘harvest festival’. Silly people arrange assorted jamborees with titles like ‘It’s a Knockout’. Back rooms are piled with toys to satisfy the ‘Mothers and Toddlers’ – rocking horses, dolls’ houses and all the rest of it. Some church premises are more like ‘Toys R Us’ or ‘Disneyland’ than a place for spiritual worship. Flower arrangers go through their weekly ritual. Traders set up their sundry stalls and occupy

themselves in various commercial activities, often on the Lord's day itself. And so it goes on and on.

Leading up to December 25th each year, a massive range of worldly Christmas fantasies dominate the services, with the Lord's day given over to puerile pursuits of one sort or another. A 'time of informal Carols', 'Bring-a-Present' services, mince pies and candlelight... these and worse are the kind of activities which push aside the preaching of the gospel. Oh, an epilogue salves the conscience! But the light is certainly covered over with a most effective basket by these arrangements (Mark 4:21). If Christmas Day clashes with the Lord's day or falls near it, more and more is it becoming the practice virtually to abandon the time of worship altogether. Oh, God is given his sop through an apology of a service early in the festive day (though some go as far as to abolish the Lord's day completely), but then the meeting house is closed-up to allow the so-called saints to feast and fun themselves to the limit of their desire, and beyond. No preaching is permitted to interrupt 'the celebrations'. Churches today do not need King James and his *Book of Sports*! This wicked carry-on is a flat contradiction of the apostolic charge, and a direct fulfilment of the apostolic prophecy found in 2 Timothy 4:1-4. Paul's charge and prophecy stand plain enough for all to read; no professed Christian can say he was never warned. 'I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables'. It is to be wondered how those who do this sort of thing can read Galatians 4:9-11 with equanimity.

Luther's comments on that last passage make interesting reading today. He tried to justify the keeping of Christmas along with other 'feasts to the end that the ministry of the word may be preserved' as he put it. Today's evidence seems to suggest – to put it no stronger – that the very opposite is in fact the outcome of the unscriptural observance of 'feasts' in the church.

I am not speaking only of liberal churches when I say this. Certainly not! I refer to not a few evangelical churches or, what is more staggering, to some supposedly Calvinistic Baptist churches. I write of what I know by direct personal experience. What goes on elsewhere I leave others to say. Where will it end? I know this much, those who undervalue the gospel today, those who prefer their worldly pleasure to the preaching of the word, the only word that can save and sanctify (2 Tim. 3:14-17), that such people might well wake up tomorrow to find that God has taken his word

away from them altogether. Christ has warned the churches that he is quite prepared to take away their lampstand (Rev. 2:5). Judgement begins ‘at the house of God’ (1 Pet. 4:17). In a short time, there may not be a Lord’s day for professing Christians to abuse, there may not be a gospel for them to despise! Why, oh why, is all this profanity taking place in the churches? It is all done in the name of Jesus, but the whole show boils down to little more than a round of sensual entertainment. Men are serving their own appetites. They like it this way. Yet Christians are commanded to note those responsible for the decadence, and avoid them and their ways (Rom. 16:17). We need constantly to remind ourselves that the day of reckoning is coming (2 Tim. 4:1-2).<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, what about the spiritual, the scriptural activities of the church? What about the prayer meeting, for example? I challenge all pastors in churches where the sort of things I have described are rampant – put a stop to them and see what happens. Bring the church back to the New Testament. And watch out! Can you see Paul engaged in the carnal activities which are so common today? The man who penned 1 Corinthians 11:22? Above all, would Christ fit into modern church life – he who cleansed the temple with the words of Luke 19:46 and John 2:16?

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During the middle years of the reign of James, another important figure came on to the scene, one whose tricky ways would have serious consequences in the battle to recover New Testament church life. Yet the man himself had no interest whatsoever in the matter. His concern was only with himself, his wealth and his power. In those areas, he was a master-craftsman. The man in question was one George Villiers. We have already seen something of Richard Bancroft and the part he played in the course of events. William Laud is another crucial personality yet to be spoken of in detail. We now look at this George Villiers.

Through the unremitting ambition of his widowed mother, Villiers became the king’s Cupbearer in 1614. Rapid promotion followed for the young man. Within a short time, he was made a Viscount, then Earl, then Duke of Buckingham. Honours were simply heaped upon him. With unfaltering skill – according to his own lights, that is – he cultivated the king’s friendship and patronage, even entering upon a homosexual relationship with him. So strong was his dominance of the king that, as James slipped down into senility at the early age of forty-seven, Buckingham was in reality the power behind the throne. As the king drooled his blasphemies

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<sup>3</sup> For further reading, see Spurgeon: *All* pp292-297,338-339,388-389. See also the extended note, ‘Inclusivism’, in my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

over his favourite, the scheming Buckingham played out the wicked farce to the full; he knew how to cosset and to tease and to gratify his besotted sovereign. In this way, the Villiers family reached the zenith of power. Many onlookers resented it, naturally. Nevertheless, James openly declared that he lived to the end that he might advance the Villiers dynasty above all others. It was another rare example of keeping his word. George's mother was made Duchess in 1623, having turned Papist the year before. His brother, though a mental defective, was made a Viscount.

As James declined further and further following the death of his wife in 1619, Buckingham saw where his own best interests lay; therefore he increasingly turned his attention to the coming king, the 'Baby Charles'. The Prince had long been jealous over Buckingham, but once the clever manipulator got to work, all resistance crumbled. He simply twisted the Prince around his little finger. It was Buckingham who helped Charles in his efforts to secure a Spanish bride, a farce I have already referred to. Although this ended in failure, nothing, it seemed, could remove the Duke from his comfortable seat in the saddle of power. It was simple. Buckingham just completely reversed his policy, conveniently turned anti-papist, and browbeat the doddering James into breaking off relations with Spain! The political and spiritual consequences of his action did not stop him in his madness. War loomed. Buckingham drove on relentlessly, however, getting rid of an important rival politician who stood in his way, even though the unfortunate man was widely liked and popular, and the king wished to save him. Being forced to act against his better judgement, such as it was by this time, James did manage to stir himself to predict the downfall of both Buckingham and the Prince. It would take time, but his fateful words would come true in the end. As he warned his son after the schemer had forced his hand to impeach Buckingham's rival: 'You will live to have your bellyful of impeachments'. Within twenty years, it would be so. It is to be wondered how many times Charles must have pondered his father's words. Nor would Buckingham die peacefully in old age. Buckingham was hated. Indeed, his ways were so suspect, a rumour gained credence upon the death of James to the effect that Buckingham had poisoned the king. The likelihood is, however, that James died of senility, finally smitten down by a stroke.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the rumour, there is no doubt that Buckingham proved to be a sad link between the reign of James and Charles. And that is the point as far as the purposes of this book are concerned. The Duke's political machinations not only spelled trouble for many people in his lifetime, but his antics contributed inevitably to the disaster of the 1640s. He carried on his mad career into the reign of

Charles thereby helping to drive a wedge between the new king and his Parliament.

What of the Church of England meanwhile? What was happening to the spiritual life within the national Church while all this corrupt manoeuvring was taking place? How did the State Church cope with James as he used both Puritans and Papists in turn so that he might preserve his throne and please his favourite? It was simple. The king had appointed as bishops men who wanted an easy life, men who could be manipulated. They were useless, and worse.

Finally, James turned away forever from the Puritans, away even from his professed Calvinism. The Church drifted down and down into Arminianism. On the other hand, Buckingham, astute as ever, began to cultivate the Puritans, but at the same time keeping a foot in both camps by casting a favourable eye upon an up-and-coming cleric by the name of Laud, that man who would prove to be of high significance in the history of the church. This William Laud was appointed chaplain to Charles, Prince of Wales, in the 1620s, and Confessor to Buckingham two years later.

Thus, as James' disastrous reign played out its last miserable years, many of the principal causes of the Civil Wars came into prominence – the growth of Arminianism, the rise of the political Buckingham and his influence over Charles, and the advancement of Laud within the State Church. Buckingham would soon vanish, destroyed by an assassin, but not before the damage had been done. Laud, however, and Charles, would remain, as would their Arminianism. The years of laxity under James would be swept away with the crowning of the new king. Very soon Laud would get a grip on things. And how!

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And so to the 27th of March, 1625, and the death of James I. His last years were marked by coarse, crude behaviour accompanied by drunkenness. His Court was evil, licentious and abandoned. Many of the Anglican clergy had become debauched and immoral. The king had wasted the national treasure, debased society, and been a thorough disaster both as a monarch and as a man. He had further strengthened the inexorable descent into Civil War begun by his predecessor. And this perverted wretch was the Supreme Governor of the Church! Four days before his death, solemn preparations were made for his end. The Church of England remained his faithful, fawning 'friend' right to the very end, duly affording him all the benefits of its system, heard his confession, and gave him the Lord's supper. The

bishop officiating at that service had the gall to report that the drunken sensualist:

Received it with the zeal and devotion as if he had not been a frail man but a cherubim clothed with flesh and blood. Our only comfort is... that as he lived like a king, so he died like a saint. Never have you read of any king that left this world more resolved, more prepared.

The funeral itself lasted for nine hours. James, an habitual swearer, drunkard, pervert and liar was, according to the funeral oration, ‘equal to Solomon in every view, and his superior in many things... [and is] now reigning gloriously with God in heaven’.

The truth of the matter is, his death was probably not regretted by anyone in his realm, for he was a veritable Jehoram; he departed ‘to no one’s sorrow’ (2 Chron. 21:20). By the time James came to die, the Church of England had decreased markedly in spirituality, its doctrine had been turned on its head, while superstitions and ceremonies were multiplying and decadence was on the increase. In the midst of all the chaos, the conforming Puritans made little or no contribution in the battle to reform the church. Besides which, James had driven out of England some of the greatest and most spiritual men and women the world has ever seen.

But though the State Church, of which James was the Supreme Governor, was in such decline, the true church of Christ was flourishing. While the State Church was going down into ruin, and conforming Puritanism was stultified as far as reform was concerned, in glowing contrast Separatism was rising and spreading with vigour. It is to the Separatists we must turn once more as we follow the battle to recover New Testament church life. It is a prospect which will be greatly welcomed by all spiritual men and women. Instead of breathing the vile stench of the pit, we shall now move into an altogether different and more healthy atmosphere. The contrast, and the relief, will be immense.

## *From Gainsborough to Amsterdam*

Truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them

Hebrews 11:15-16

*Brewster – worship at Babworth – young Bradford – children in worship – about 1602, a Separatist church formed at Gainsborough – its spiritual prosperity – friendly division, about 1604, to form another church at Scrooby – small or large churches? – Robinson – at Cambridge – at Norwich – expelled from the Church of England – minister of Puritan congregation in Norwich – joins church at Scrooby – Smyth – Puritan lecturer at Lincoln – ejected for personal preaching – joins church at Gainsborough – becomes pastor – persecution of the churches – decision to move to Holland – their trials – Amsterdam the centre of Separatism*

In the year 1575, Scrooby Manor House in Nottinghamshire became the home of a young man by the name of William Brewster, when it served as the ‘tied-cottage’ in connection with his father’s work as a steward or manager on the Scrooby estate. Ironically, in the light of events – for God has a sense of humour (Ps. 2:4) – the Manor House had been lived in by Cardinal Wolsey, seventy years before. Indeed, it was from that very house that he had written to his king, Henry VIII, advising him to ‘depress this new pernicious sect called Lutherans’. But it was not the Reformed faith which was to be ‘depressed’; Wolsey himself was to be broken. He had risen to the supreme position in effect in both State and Church when he was made papal legate in 1518, but in the aftermath of Henry’s break with Rome, Wolsey was ruined. Only his premature death in 1530 saved him from execution.

In 1580, Brewster entered Peterhouse, Cambridge, just after Robert Browne had been arousing the people through his sermons and by his Separatist arguments. Brewster, one among many, was certainly influenced by Browne’s teaching. For some reason, the young student did not take a degree at the University, although he left Cambridge sufficiently competent in Greek and Latin to enter the service of a Puritan gentleman. The frequent spiritual conversations he enjoyed in Sir William Davidson’s home encouraged Brewster in his continuing search for truth, and did much to promote his spiritual walk with God. So much so, when he returned to Scrooby in 1589, he was respected by all, being regarded ‘in good esteem

among them, especially the godly'. He was 'of a very cheerful spirit, very sociable and pleasant among his friends', but he could not abide the proud, the dressy, and those better-off people who looked down upon others because they were poor. He himself was generous to a fault, often giving away more than he could afford in order to advance the Puritan cause. Sensible and kind towards men, he was an earnest though immature believer, who at that time was still seeking to know more of God's mind. Nevertheless, even though his convictions were not yet entirely settled, he was 'walking according to the light he saw till the Lord revealed further to him'.

Brewster was encouraged in this when he found godly company among a few Puritan ministers in the area – men with whom he enjoyed a rich sense of spiritual fellowship. One of these men was Richard Clyfton, a Church of England minister at Babworth, situated about six miles from Scrooby. Clyfton was a mighty Puritan preacher, a 'grave' minister, 'a fatherly old man with a great white beard'. Brewster, now with his wife and son, attended the services at Babworth, as did many others from the surrounding villages. This number included a twelve-year-old orphan, one William Bradford. Bradford lived twelve miles off, but thought nothing of the twenty-four mile walk every Lord's day to sit under the 'illuminating ministry' of Clyfton, as he described it. Years later, Bradford could say how much he owed to the old man's preaching in that he dated his 'holy, prayerful, watchful walk with God' from those early days. Despite his tender years he greatly valued the Lord's days at Babworth, gladly overcoming the many difficulties which stood in the way of his attendance. For the young orphan did not only have a long tramp to sit under the gospel preaching, but he also faced opposition from his closest relations and neighbours. Nevertheless, though they were angry with him, mocked and called him a Puritan, Bradford let nothing and nobody 'divert him from his pious inclinations and the goodness of God'. The kindly Brewster showed much affection to the young lad and practically adopted him into his family.

This is a striking testimony is it not? A boy of twelve, an orphan, opposed by friends and family, walking twenty-four miles every Sunday, summer and winter... and for what purpose? To hear a faithful minister preach the word of God. This speaks of a spiritual appetite of a high order. Does it not rebuke many of us in our carnal generation? Bradford did not only not forsake the assemblies of the saints (Heb. 10:25) – he positively delighted in them. And the preaching he heard proved a life-long benefit to him; indeed of eternal benefit. What feeble, worldly excuses are frequently trotted out and offered for our lack of spiritual desire these days. Does the fault lie with today's preachers – is the preaching so poor that men do not

feel it worth the effort to hear it? Is it worth that little? Or does the fault lie with the hearers? In short, do we lack Clyftons or Bradfords? Or both?

Again, very few churches these days would dream of trying to feed twelve-year-olds on a diet of solid preaching. It is a rarity indeed. I referred to this point in more detail in ‘Boiled Roots’, but here is another example of the way our forefathers saw the place of children in worship. And it stands in marked contrast to the attitude of the vast majority today. Not many Christians want their children to sit under the sermons of a ‘grave’ minister, do they? Quite the reverse. Many complain about that sort of preaching and just will not attend a church where the ministry is solidly spiritual, but they look elsewhere, saying they want ‘something for their children’. What do they want for them? If we want anything less than powerful preaching for us and our children, on the day of judgement the likes of William Bradford will arise and condemn us. If the truth be known, many parents use their children as an excuse to hide their own lack of spiritual appetite. It is not so much their children – they do not want a grave minister for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

To take a leap of a hundred and fifty years: In 1739, George Whitefield heard Gilbert Tennent preach. About a year later, he strongly urged Tennent to make a preaching tour throughout New England to reap where he himself had sown. Tennent was persuaded to go. What kind of preacher was Tennent? Why did Whitefield choose him – what was *his* opinion of the man? Obviously he must have been impressed by the sermon he had heard. He was! ‘Never before heard I such a searching sermon’, he wrote. ‘Hypocrites must either soon be converted or enraged at his preaching’. Others have told us that Tennent was ‘grave and venerable... commanding... exceedingly earnest and impressive... very faithful was he in warning sinners of their danger, and persuading them to seek salvation in earnest... a more strenuous asserter of due and strict discipline... As [his] preaching was very alarming and awakening to careless sinners, so it was much blessed to this end, wherever he preached... And his preaching was as searching and rousing as ever I heard’. What of the New England preaching in particular? It was ‘both terrible and searching’. What effect did it have? ‘By his arousing and scriptural preaching, deep and pungent convictions were wrought in the minds of many hundreds of persons... And now was such a time as we never knew... more came to [one of the New England ministers] in one week, in deep concern, than in the whole twenty-

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<sup>1</sup> Since writing the above, it is only fair to point out, I have come to think about Bradford’s long journey into assurance, and I have written against the kind of teaching that produced it. I refer, as before, to preparationism – see my forthcoming book on the law.

four years of [that man's] preceding ministry'. Reliable witnesses said that thousands were affected in Boston alone.

Reader, surely you can picture this grave, arousing, strict, earnest preacher – warning, pleading, urging, calling, persuading sinners to flee to Christ. And the Lord granted him tremendous success in New England. On his return home, Tennent wrote to Whitefield to tell him about it. He was able to speak of the thousands brought 'under soul-concern'. But, reader, please listen to this next remark – the point above all others which I wish to emphasise is this – among those thousands, Tennent could say that 'many children were deeply affected about their souls, and several had received consolation'. Think of it – *children* – many children convicted and converted! And under such a man's preaching! This simple fact would stagger the vast majority of evangelicals today – if they only knew of it. Notice what I called it – a simple fact. In our degenerate age, most churches would regard it as astonishing, utterly inconceivable; even to put children before such a minister would be virtually unthinkable nowadays. It would horrify the vocal majority. I fear that very few out of the millions of professing Christians in England at the start of the 21st century – let alone their children – would endure Tennent's preaching. No! Not for a minute. And the disastrous consequences in the churches are obvious (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Shame on us! Oh, may the Lord have mercy upon us.<sup>2</sup>

The following two reports appeared in the press in 1990s; the contrast with the above could hardly be greater. I am bound to wonder if we are talking about the same religion. The reports give a fair illustration of the contemporary idea of spiritual work among children, and if they do not amount to a turning aside to fables (2 Tim. 4:4) when compared to the gospel work we have just heard about – both in Babworth and in New England – I do not know what does. The word Paul used means a narrative, a story, a fiction, a fable, an invention. Reader, judge the matter for yourself.

The first report concerned several professedly Calvinistic Baptist churches which organised a 'club' with 'daily activity sessions' in which the 'children got the chance to try a wide variety of games, competitions and quizzes, including sand sculpting, and to hear Bible stories'. The supposedly Calvinistic minister in charge explained that 'the aim of the club [was] to build Christian values within the children, let them know about God and let them have a good time'.

I submit that the aim and the methods just outlined are a far cry from Clyfton's ministry to Bradford four hundred years ago. Similarly with

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<sup>2</sup> As I have noted earlier, for Whitefield himself addressing children, see my *Particular Redemption and The Free Offer*, where I quote from Whitefield: *Sermons* pp196-197; *Select* pp83-84.

Gilbert Tennent. I go further. Reader, I put it to you that Paul would recognise Clyton's and Tennent's work, but he would be completely flummoxed by 'games and sand sculpting' in the name of Christ. And what does it mean 'to build in Christian values'? All children are fallen in Adam and they must be born again. We know that the new birth which leads to saving faith comes about by the preaching of the gospel (Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23-25; Rom. 10:8-15). What is more, children are not saved in a special way because they are young. Salvation is nothing to do with age. Whatever the age, the sinner must be called to faith by the preaching of the gospel. And once they are converted, children as well as adults must be instructed in the gospel of Christ. As Paul told Timothy: 'Continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

Note the great benefits which the Scriptures bring to sinners – salvation in the first place, following which the Scriptures are profitable for doctrine, and so on. What is more, all these benefits can be 'from childhood'. I have referred to this verse before – I remind you that the word used for 'childhood' indicates a very early age indeed. How early? It is used even of the foetus! (Luke 1:41). I realise that common sense tells us that the foetus cannot listen to preaching, but it is completely right to regard Paul's words to Timothy as harking back to Timothy's youngest days. I am convinced that Richard Clyton understood this principle and acted upon it in his approach to William Bradford. And in so doing his ministry was signally blessed of God.

The second press report is even more disturbing. Another evangelical church also organised a 'children's club'. The leader 'dressed as Pirate King... told the children he was in the king of Kings' navy, and he was trying to stop the bad and miserable pirate, Black Patch, stealing the king's treasure'. The report went on to say that 'this was the continuing theme of the week, and resulted in many fun-filled adventures'. The Pirate King told the children that 'the treasure is what the king of Kings most wants'. The press report said that 'the children enjoyed the mixture of games, aerobics and Bible stories'. It went on to say that 'at the end of the week, when [the leader] asked the children if they would like Jesus as their friend, 31 children made a positive response, including one 16-year-old onlooker'. A helper explained what the attitude of the team was at this point, saying that 'the really important work starts now. We need to follow up the youngsters

who made a response and, where appropriate, put them in contact with a local church which has clubs, activities, Christian friendship and fun for all ages'. The club was rounded off when, 'in a colourful service on the Sunday, [the leader, dressed as the Pirate King] emphasised the importance of being a friend of Jesus for ever and telling other people about him'.

Reader, I ask you to observe the words which are missing from both press reports. There is no mention of sin, the blood of Christ, repentance, faith and other vital gospel matters. And the significance lies, of course, not only in the missing words – the gospel itself is missing. To 'build in Christian values' or 'to ask the children if they want to be a friend of Jesus', does not constitute preaching the gospel. The twelve-year-old Bradford did not walk the twenty-four miles round trip to Babworth in order to have fun. He was looking for Christ in the preaching of the gospel. And he found him.<sup>3</sup> Clyfton did not offer the boy a time of activities and games in the name of Christ. Bradford did not have Christian values built into him; rather, he began his 'holy, prayerful, watchful walk with God' under the 'illuminating ministry' of the aged, 'grave' preacher. I put it to you that the second press report shows that the present-day spiritual approach to children has more in common with the antics of Gilbert and Sullivan, or a pantomime, than with Jesus Christ and the gospel. Can you see Paul dressing up as a Pirate King? The mere suggestion is an abomination. The offensive farce reminds me of the words of Kenneth Macrae, in reference to services on board ship in the early 50s. 'Apart from the reading of the word the whole service was a piece of senseless mummary which must have been as obnoxious to God as it was repellent to common sense', he wrote.

If anyone should try to counter my attack by appealing to Paul's, 'I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some' (1 Cor. 9:22), I can only respond by saying that, in my view, he or she has stretched the apostle's words far beyond New Testament limits of elasticity. Indeed, if such an argument carried the day, I, for one, wonder what would *not* be done and 'justified' in Christ's name!

No! How are the mighty fallen! The contrast between the way many churches approach children today and the way the Puritans, the early Separatists and their spiritual descendants approached them is plain for all to see. Consider once again Spurgeon's attitude towards children. In 'Boiled Roots', I referred to his views on children and the ordinances of Christ. What of his views on teaching children? Would he have agreed with the modern notion that children are not able to understand deep spiritual matters? Did he rig himself out in a vaudeville outfit? Did he

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<sup>3</sup> But see my earlier note on preparationism.

think that gospel doctrines need to be watered down for children? that solemn experiences like conviction and repentance are out of the question? that giving children a good time, letting them have fun, is the right way to go about the vitally serious business? Did he advocate tomfoolery? He did not! What results did he get?

In a sermon on Mark 10:13-16 entitled ‘Jesus and the Children’, Spurgeon spoke strongly against doubting the capacity of children to receive blessing from Christ. He said:

Upon this subject... I will say broadly that I have more confidence in the spiritual life of the children that I have received into this church than I have in the spiritual condition of the adults thus received. I will go even further than that, and say that I have usually found a clearer knowledge of the gospel and a warmer love to Christ in the child-converts than in the man-converts. I will even astonish you still more by saying that I have sometimes met with a deeper spiritual experience in children of ten and twelve than I have in certain persons of fifty and sixty... Oh, dear friends, talk not of a child’s incapacity for repentance! I have known a child weep herself to sleep by the month together under a crushing sense of sin. If you would know a deep, and bitter, and awful fear of the wrath of God, let me tell you what I felt as a boy. If you would know joy in the Lord, many a child has been as full of it as his little heart could hold. If you want to know what faith in Jesus is, you must not look to those who have been bemuddled by the heretical jargon of the times, but to the dear children who have taken Jesus at his word, and believed in him, and loved him, and therefore know and are sure that they are saved. Capacity for believing lies more in the child than in the man. We grow less rather than more capable of faith: every year brings the unregenerate mind further away from God, and makes it less capable of receiving the things of God. No ground is more prepared for the good seed than that which as yet has not been trodden down in the highway, nor has been as yet overgrown with thorns. Not yet has the child learned the deceits of pride, the falsehoods of ambition, the delusions of worldliness, the tricks of the trade, the sophistries of philosophy; and so far it has an advantage over the adult. In any case, the new birth is the work of the Holy Ghost, and he can as easily work upon youth as upon age.

Can you imagine Spurgeon trying to obtain the scriptural ends he spoke of in children, all the while dressed up as a Pirate King? The idea is preposterous; it would be the height of incongruity. He could not possibly have done it. Nor should it be attempted today.

And what doctrines should feature in sermons and addresses where children are present? Doctrines? For children? Yes, indeed! Listen to Spurgeon again, this time in a sermon entitled ‘The Blood of Sprinkling and the Children’. I referred to it in ‘Boiled Roots’, when dealing with the matter of children at the ordinances of Christ. Let me continue with it. Spurgeon said:

Let us be ready to explain the great transaction by which God is just, and yet sinners are justified. Children can well understand the doctrine of the expiatory sacrifice; it was meant to be a gospel for the youngest. The gospel of substitution is a simplicity, though it is a mystery. We ought not to be content until our little ones know and trust in [the] finished sacrifice. This is essential knowledge, and the key to all other spiritual teaching. May our dear children know the cross, and they will have begun well. With all their gettings may they get an understanding of this, and they will have the foundation rightly laid.

This will necessitate your teaching the child his need of a Saviour. You must not hold back from this needful task... Tell him he must be born again... Flimsy religion is neither good for young nor old... Do not hesitate to tell the child his ruin; he will not else desire the remedy. Tell him also of the punishment of sin, and warn him of its terror. Be tender, but be true. Do not hide from the youthful sinner the truth, however terrible it may be... set before him the judgement-seat, and remind him that he will have to give an account of things done in the body. Labour to arouse the conscience...

Children need to learn the doctrine of the cross that they may find immediate salvation... What a mercy it will be if our children are thoroughly grounded in the doctrine of redemption by Christ! If they are warned against the false gospels of this age, and if they are taught to rest on the eternal rock of Christ's finished work, we may hope to have a generation following us which will maintain the faith, and will be better than their fathers. Your Sunday schools are admirable; but what is their purpose if you do not teach the gospel in them?... All the real good lies in what is taught the children. The most fundamental truth should be made most prominent; and what is this but the cross? Some talk to children about being good boys and girls, and so on; that is to say, they preach the law to the children, though they would preach the gospel to grown-up people!... Children need the gospel, the whole gospel, the unadulterated gospel; they ought to have it, and if they are taught by the Spirit of God they are as capable of receiving it as persons of ripe years. Teach the little ones that Jesus died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.

Edward Payson (1783-1827), preached a sermon on John 6:37, 'Christ Rejects None Who Come Unto Him'. Payson said:

Permit me then to apply the subject by pressing everyone present, who has not already embraced the Saviour, to come to him without delay. As the mouth of God, and in my Master's name, I invite everyone of you to do this. Our Creator, our God has made a great feast, a marriage feast for his Son; a feast for... sinners... To this feast you are now invited. No tickets of admission are necessary. The Master of the feast stands at the door to receive you, declaring that not one, who comes, shall be cast out; and as his servant, sent forth for this very purpose, sent especially to you, I now invite you to come. I invite you, children; for there is a place for you. Leave your toys and follies then, and come to Christ. I invite you who are young; for your presence is especially desired. Leave your sinful amusements and companions then, and come to the Saviour... Particularly do I invite you, who are parents, to come and bring your children with you to the Saviour's feast.

Reader, may I refer you to yet another sermon by Spurgeon on this matter?<sup>4</sup> I believe the two systems I have put before you could hardly be more different. On the one hand, that practiced by men like Clyfton, Bradford, Tennent, Payson and Spurgeon; on the other, modern-day notions. For my own part, I have not the slightest shadow of a doubt which system I prefer. I have no hesitation in saying: Give me the old – it is far better! Not just because it is old, but because it is scriptural; scriptural in its aim, in its method and in its result.

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To return to Babworth: with so many spiritual men and women and children in the region, it is no surprise to learn that by about the turn of the century a Separatist movement broke out in the East Midlands around Scrooby and Babworth. A number of godly people, including Brewster and Bradford, began to assemble for worship in the town of Gainsborough every Lord's day. The other Puritan ministers in the area – men like Richard Bernard at Worksop and Thomas Toller at Sheffield – further encouraged this Separatist development. Also it is very likely that one of the secret churches of Queen Mary's reign had existed in Gainsborough. Thus, Separatism became firmly rooted in the place, and some time after 1602 this group of believers took the fateful step and formed themselves into a Congregational church by means of a covenant, and:

As the Lord's free people joined themselves, by a covenant of the Lord, into a church estate in the fellowship of the gospel to walk in all his ways made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them.

This is noteworthy. They regarded themselves as God's people, answerable to him alone and not in bondage to the will of man, so that even though earthly powers might forbid them to meet in Separatist conventicles, they would obey God, not waiting for the magistrate to grant them permission. In addition they were willing to meet any cost in order to enjoy New Testament church life as they saw it. Further, they did not think they understood everything but they were ready to receive more light; in fact they expected further reform. And they trusted only in God's grace to help them perform their vows.

The members of this Congregational church were drawn from many miles round about Gainsborough. God prospered them to the extent that within three or four years their numbers had grown so large that, about

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<sup>4</sup> Namely MTP Vol.31 pp577-588.

1604, the church amicably divided into two, with one church meeting at Gainsborough and the other at Scrooby.

Here is an important principle. Many Christians today think in terms of a church with a large membership. The greater the number, the better it is. But is this New Testament thinking? Well, we know of the thousands converted on the Day of Pentecost and immediately after, but just how large were most of the New Testament churches? We simply do not know. They never spoke of their numbers. It does not seem to have been an issue for them. As for the Day of Pentecost, it is quite possible – it is almost certain – that many of those first converts were diasporan visitors in Jerusalem (Acts 2:9-11; see also John 12:20; Acts 8:27) who went back to their home countries after the Feast. Having said that, it is likely that the church in Jerusalem in the beginning was very large (Acts 2:41; 5:14; 6:1,7). Of course, the apostles were living there at the time, consequently the large numbers could be dealt with quite easily. In any event this soon came to an end when the Jerusalem church was scattered under persecution (Acts 8:1). From that time on, it is probable that the churches were not large. We know that at least some of them could meet in a house (Rom. 16:5,23; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2). Furthermore, Jesus spoke in terms of ‘two or three’ in the context of the church (Matt. 18:20), a remarkable number in the light of this discussion. He also addressed his followers as a ‘little flock’ (Luke 12:32). The idea of the ‘remnant’ (Mic. 7:18; Rom. 11:5), and God’s deliberate election of the foolish, the weak, the base or lowly, the despised and those who are of no account in order to magnify his grace (1 Cor. 1:26-29), would lend further support to the view that churches might not be excessive in size. Certainly we must avoid thinking the way the world does. God’s thoughts and ways are very different to those of men (Isa. 55:8). Large is not always best. Quality is far more important than quantity. Interestingly, on this point Calvin said:

We ought not to judge by the largeness of the number, unless we choose to prefer the chaff to the wheat... We are wont always to desire a multitude, and to estimate by it the prosperity of the church. On the contrary, we should rather desire to be few in number, and that in all of us the glory of God may shine brightly.

Nor did the friendly division at Gainsborough weaken either church; rather it strengthened both of them. For one thing, in a very large church it is hard to see how the New Testament duties of church members can be properly carried out. How can we watch over each other, know, encourage and love each other in massive churches? Where numbers are large, the members quite often have to admit that they do not even know one other’s names, do not recognise one another and cannot possibly talk to each other, let alone fulfil the biblical duties of church members. This cannot be right, can it?

What is more, think of the double witness of the two churches instead of one, since the gospel was now maintained in Scrooby and Gainsborough.

Some people want large churches because they think they will carry more clout with the government of the day simply by reason of their size. The voice of the church will be heard in high places, and being an influential, well-attended church, one which is probably wealthy into the bargain, then those in power will be forced to listen to it. They will have to sit up and take notice of its views. In this way the gospel will be advanced by social and political change. That is the thinking. Some Christians dismiss small, independent churches as being weak and of little or no consequence in the ‘corridors of power’. But this is nothing other than the theory of Constantine, is it not? I ask again: Will we never be free of it? Churches and governments do not mix; at least, not in New Testament terms. We do not want political power. It has nothing to do with us. We should not want any part in it.

Then again, some people want large churches to enable them to set up institutions such as seminaries, Christian schools, missionary boards, old-people’s homes and the like. Then, joining in with other large churches in common enterprises, really massive projects can be undertaken. This is bound to have an immense influence! Or that is how the theory goes. There is only one thing to say about these ideas; there is not the slightest justification in the New Testament for such developments. Jesus Christ instituted only one body – the church. The church has no business to found any other body. Where in the New Testament did any church set up any other institution? Extra-church activity was unknown in those days. Do we think we have ‘improved’ on the apostles? The churches at Scrooby and Gainsborough were much closer to the New Testament in their thinking and practice than many churches today. They did not worry their heads about influencing governments. What was that to do with them? They did not think in terms of numbers – only to the extent that they might be too large for them to carry out their proper church life. How refreshingly different to many modern notions this was; how very much more like the spirit of the New Testament. We shall meet this practice of friendly division again when we reach the 1630s.

It has to be wondered that if we were faced with the same ‘problem’ as these early Separatists, and wanted to do something similar, would things go quite as smoothly today? A very different procedure might well be adopted. Perhaps the church at Gainsborough would write to the Ancient church, both in London and Amsterdam, and explain it all. A conference might be called, papers read, resolutions passed, a Moderator, a secretariat and committees set up, books published, an association put in place, and all the rest of it. *And nothing would happen!* We can only be grateful that

these men were made of better material. They did not merely talk, pray, discuss, agonise, debate and think about what to do. They got on with it! They were practical men and down to earth. May we be like them. The churches need men who live in the real world, not in the rarefied atmosphere of endless theories. God uses the heavenly minded who have their feet on the ground to advance his gospel in the world.

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In 1604, a Cambridge Fellow resigned his position as a Church of England minister, and joined the Congregational church at Scrooby. John Robinson was destined to play a major part in the battle to recover the life of the church of the New Testament.

Robinson was born in Lincolnshire, possibly in Gainsborough, about 1575. He went to Cambridge where it almost certain that he was influenced by William Perkins, who lectured at his college at the time. It is probable that Robinson was actually awakened and converted under that powerful ministry. He graduated in 1598 and became a Fellow. On leaving Cambridge he was appointed a Church of England curate in the city of Norwich 'or thereabouts'. At this stage he was a conforming Puritan, but he wanted reformation of Church ceremonies and vestments, and he was prepared to adjust the Prayer Book service as he saw fit. Though he was horrified at the thought of Separatism, and shrank from it, he certainly felt the tension which all Puritans experienced over the lack of progress in Church reform. As with many others, the Hampton Court fiasco did nothing to alleviate his worries and fears. But in spite of a severe sense of strain, Robinson did all he could to remain a loyal Churchman and keep himself within the established Church. Even so, he was much troubled in his mind.

But it was all futile. It was not long before the Church of England took the initiative and drove him out. Being suspended because of his Puritan tendencies, he became the pastor of a Puritan congregation in Norwich at the age of twenty-five. This brought with it an inevitable risk of fines and imprisonment; indeed the State Church did excommunicate some 'for resorting unto and praying with Mr Robinson'. However, this time with the godly men and women in Norwich was a very precious experience for Robinson, and he never forgot it. Some twenty years later, when living in Leyden, he wrote a book to support the people when they were attacked for their view of preaching, calling it *The People's Plea for the Exercise of Prophecy*.

Meanwhile, as he continued to minister in the Puritan congregation in Norwich, he was growing increasingly troubled about the order of the Church of England as compared to that of the New Testament. He read

some books on the subject. Whose? Tantalizingly, we do not know. But several had been published, illegally, by the early Separatists, as I have before explained. The books which he read certainly influenced him very much. Robinson owned his great debt to the unknown authors when he later wrote:

I do indeed confess, to the glory of God and my own shame, that a long time before I entered this way [of separation], I took some taste of the truth in it by some treatises published in justification of it.

But he went on honestly to admit – to his shame – that though he had felt the force of the arguments of the Separatists, he had placed too much confidence in the learning and godliness of his fellow-conforming Puritans, and that this held him back. He acknowledged:

The very principal thing which for the time quenched all further appetite in me, was the over-valuation which I made of the learning and holiness of [the conforming Puritans], blushing in myself to have a thought of pressing one hair's-breadth before them.

The only thing that finally overcame his deference to men was God's word. He explained that 'had not the truth been burning in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones (Jer. 20:9), I had never broken these bonds of flesh and blood, wherein I was so straitly tied, but had suffered the light of God to have been put out in mine own unthankful heart by other men's darkness'.

This is a highly significant set of statements, and furnishes yet another challenge and warning to us. Robinson admitted that he fell into the trap of putting men before God, and this held him back from obedience to Scripture. How easy it is to follow men, especially good men. But this is dangerous and wrong. We must follow men only insofar as they lead us in the biblical way. The Holy Spirit commanded the Bereans for their attitude to preaching, saying that their readiness to hear it, coupled with their eagerness to search the Scriptures to verify what they heard, was most praiseworthy (Acts 17:11). This is always the right course for believers, is it not? It is very important – it is essential – at all times 'to obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29). 'Let God be true but every man a liar' (Rom. 3:4). If we replace God's word with the commands of men, our worship is vain (Mark 7:1-13).

Robinson, eventually becoming convinced of the Separatist position, resigned his Fellowship, left the Church of England, threw in his lot with the Separatists, and joined the Congregational church at Scrooby in 1604.

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About 1606, a certain John Smyth joined the Congregational church at Gainsborough. Here was another man of whom the world was destined to hear a great deal more. Remarkably, it was a Church of England bishop who wrote that ‘none of the English Separatists had a finer mind or a more beautiful soul than John Smyth. None of them succeeded in expressing with so much reasonableness and consistency their aspirations after a spiritual system of religious belief and practice’. These words must be remembered when we later find Smyth moving his position with great rapidity. He was consistent in that he was always aspiring after more and more scriptural light.

The early life of Smyth is shrouded in uncertainty. Frequently, he has been confused with other men named Smyth or Smith, a common enough name, after all! It has been claimed that he was the vicar of Gainsborough at one time, but this is a mistake. It is certain that Smyth was a pupil of Francis Johnson in the University of Cambridge – Johnson, the same who was later to become the pastor of the Ancient church, referred to at length in ‘Boiled Roots’. Smyth adopted Puritan views during his time at Cambridge, most likely under Johnson. He graduated about 1586 and became a Fellow in 1594, was ordained a Church of England minister, and probably held a living somewhere in the East Midlands in the 1590s. (Some historians think he did not take a living to avoid being badgered for his tendency to nonconformity).

On the 27th of September, 1600, Smyth was appointed Lecturer in the city of Lincoln – a Puritan position – the duties, as explained before, being that of a preacher without pastoral responsibility. He was elected to this position by the city Corporation with the narrowest of margins – eight votes to seven. Whereupon, he was granted a house or equivalent in rent, leave to keep three cows on the common, and paid a stipend of £40 *per annum*. When these more than generous terms are placed alongside Henry Ainsworth’s ‘sixpence a week and boiled roots’, the comparison I made when looking that man – between the financial lot of the conforming Puritans and that of the Separatists – is certainly brought sharply into focus. Taking all in all, the living standard of the Puritan Smyth in Lincoln, compared to that of the Separatist Ainsworth in Amsterdam, meant that what Ainsworth had to live on for a year, Smyth enjoyed every week!

After a couple of years in the post at Lincoln, Smyth had so pleased the Corporation that they assured him that the position was his for life. Yet within a few weeks this promise or contract was annulled and he was sacked! Why? Smyth was accused of personal preaching, direct preaching against good men. Here were echoes of the Libertine criticism of Calvin at Geneva! Indeed, echoes of the scribes and their hatred of Christ (Mark 12:12). It would seem that Smyth’s preaching offended some of the city

Fathers, who did not like the conviction of sin which his sermons aroused in them. It is probable that they liked the Puritan preacher's doctrine, but not the duty aspect of it, with its reproof of their sin!

It is readily granted that some sins must be reproved in private; but in all probability this was not the issue at Lincoln. It was Smyth's plain, penetrating preaching they did not like. It is not the first time we have met this censure of a faithful preacher, nor of this attempt to drive a wedge between preaching *per se* and the spiritual discipline brought about by that very preaching – Calvin has already been mentioned. Nor will it be the last we shall hear of the matter. We all have an in-built resistance to the searching power of the Scriptures. But what is preaching for? Is it an academic entertainment? Is it a display of speaking ability? An exhibition of oratorical skills?

Preaching is designed to cut and wound, not only comfort and console. What is more, our true spiritual comfort rises out of a faithful opening of our wound. We must guard against the love of bare Reformed doctrine, of a mental fascination with it, and being content merely with its correct exposition. We must look for something far more personal and pointed than that in the exercises of the pulpit. After all, the Scriptures are 'profitable' – for what? They are 'profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness' (2 Tim. 3:16). Doctrine comes first, yes, and we must demand – before anything else – solid, scriptural doctrine in the sermons we hear. But we must not stop there. We dare not, if we value our souls. There is far more to preaching than that. We must desire to be reproved and corrected by the doctrine of God's word.

Further, since God deals with us and our sin through his preached word – and this is not always comfortable or pleasant – we must be very careful and self-disciplined if we are not to let ourselves retaliate against the faithful preacher. Rather, we ought to be grateful to God for granting us a minister who will deal personally and directly with his hearers. It may not be cosy for us, but it is profitable; both for this life and for eternity. We must remember that 'faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful' (Prov. 27:6). 'A man who flatters his neighbour spreads a net for his feet' (Prov. 29:5). Faithful preachers wound; they do not flatter us. Men of this stamp are not ten-a-penny!

We have a biblical example of real preaching (2 Sam. 12:1-15) when 'the LORD sent Nathan to David' to reprove him for his sin. The prophet certainly explained the nature of David's offence, and he did it with careful attention to detail, but he did not stop at that. Far from it! He was clear, very clear, yet he went further; he was both sharp and explicit at the same time. Indeed, he used his clear explanation to frame a direct challenge to David, this personal application being the thrust of Nathan's address. He

said: ‘You are the man!... Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? You have killed... you have taken...’.

Notice this ‘you, you, you’. This is such a vital point. It may appear small but it is of the utmost importance. For instance, the preacher must fix his hearers in his sight. Eye contact is essential. Too many preachers stare at sheets of paper in front of them, or peer out of the back window, or seem to preach to the ceiling. Perhaps they are addressing a spider dangling from the lights! This is a bad mistake. Preachers must look into the eyes and souls of those who hear them. This is what preaching is about. What is more, the personal word ‘you’ must be used. It is not ‘we’ and ‘us’ when preaching. This false humility has got to stop. It is ‘you’. Of course, the preacher has to be a listener besides being a preacher, but nearly all the force goes out of a sermon if he keeps on watering it down by speaking of ‘us’ and ‘we’. If this is done the preacher is not preaching – he is lecturing. A glance at the sermons recorded in Acts will more than justify what I have said. See how often the biblical preachers used the word ‘you’.

David responded to this direct, personal preaching by a condemnation of himself and not the prophet. He said: ‘I have sinned against the LORD’ (2 Sam. 12:13). Nathan was a faithful servant of God, especially in that he had the courage to preach one-to-one; he could not take refuge in a pulpit, six feet above contradiction. Nor did he preach to a large congregation. It was simply Nathan to David. And he did not flinch. All honour to the man. He did not yield to the temptation for all preachers, which is to heal the hurt of God’s people slightly or superficially, ‘saying, “Peace, peace!” when there is no peace’ (Jer. 6:14). It is always an temptation for a minister to flatter his hearers. They ought to value a man who does not. Ahimaaz liked to deliver a popular message, and he took care to fudge the awkward bits (2 Samuel 18:19-30). He wanted to make the hearer happy so he avoided saying anything painful which might disturb the peace. The question is: Do we prefer a Ahimaaz or a Nathan in the pulpit?

I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not asking that the pulpit should be turned into a coward’s castle, from which a bitter man can hurl insults upon a congregation. He does not climb the pulpit steps in order to settle old scores; not at all. There must be no violent personal attacks upon named or half-named individuals; that is not the spirit (Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 2:24). But I repeat the point: Preaching must be in the vocative case and in the imperative mood.

Consider Samuel to Saul (1 Sam. 15:14-29), Nathan to David (2 Sam. 12:7-14), Elijah and Micaiah to Ahab (1 Kings 18:17-19; 21:17-27; 22:8-28), Elijah to the people (1 Kings 18:21) and to the servants of Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:3-6), and his letter to Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:12-15), John the Baptist to Herod (Mark 6:14-20), Peter to Simon (Acts 8:18-24), and Paul

to Elymas (Acts 13:9-11) and to Festus and Agrippa (Acts 26:24-29) as further examples of real preaching. Notice how the biblical preachers were prepared to ask questions, awkward, personal questions, not to find out, but to point out. Christ demanded answers (Mark 8:17-21,27,29,36-37, for example); the New Testament teachers frequently used interrogation. Much of the energy of a sermon is lost if the preacher always deals in statements and never uses questions to probe his hearers. This may well be embarrassing for the preacher and uncomfortable for the congregation, but it is essential.

Elijah was accused of trouble-making, Micaiah likewise, Amos the same, Christ, Paul and Silas too (1 Kings 18:17; 22:8; Amos 7:10; Luke 23:5; John 7:7; Acts 16:20; 17:6). Christ said there was no escape from it for his faithful followers (John 15:18-25). How should we react? By the spirit of Matthew 5:11-12. True preachers are certain to run into opposition because preaching is not a quiet talk or a cosy fireside chat; it is not meant to be a weekly boost to professing Christians to support them in their carnal ways, nor an amusing diversion for pagans. A sermon is a thrust with the sword of the Spirit. There is no sugar in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 4:2. Paul made Felix afraid (Acts 24:24-25).

When Ahab confronted Elijah, the prophet did not kowtow but came back even stronger when criticised. F.W.Krummacher commented on Elijah's robust words to the king, saying:

Such language as this is seldom heard upon earth. The world is full of flatterers and dissemblers, and such characters abound not only in palaces, but also in ordinary society; but faithful servants of God, who are dead to self-interest, who so love their brethren as to be unwilling to suffer sin upon them – such men are rare indeed. Oh ye ministers of Christ, among high and low, let us not complain of the little fruit of our labours till we have first complained of our own too great love of the praise of men!

Calvin asserted ‘that those teachers are guilty of gross impropriety, who are so much afraid to speak harshly, that they give indulgence to the slothfulness of the flesh’. And Spurgeon, when he concluded a very pointed sermon on August 9th, 1857, said: ‘Now, I do not know whether I have been personal to anybody this morning’. Did he apologise for it? Certainly not! ‘I sincerely hope I have’, he declared. He went on:

I meant to be. I know there are a great many characters in the world that must have a cap made exactly to fit them, or else they will never wear it, and I have tried as near as I could to do it. If you will not say: ‘How well that applied to my neighbour’, but just for once say: ‘How well it applied to me’, I shall hope that there will be some good follow from this exhortation; and though the Antinomian may turn away, and say: ‘Ah! it was only a legal sermon’, my love to that precious Antinomian. I do not care about his opinion. My Saviour

preached like that, and I shall do the same. I believe it is right that Christians should be told what they should do...

A few weeks later, he took the same line:

Now... by God's help, I shall labour to be personal... I ask... every... person that he will please to understand that I am preaching *to him*, and *at him*; and if there be anything that is personal and pertinent to his own case, I beseech him, as for life and death, to let it have its full weight with him, and not begin to think of his neighbour, to whom, perhaps, it may be even more pertinent, but whose business certainly does not concern him [emphasis his].

It is one of the greatest tokens of God's love when he sends a faithful preacher to a people. Sinners may complain at the exposure of their sin, but in truth it is a sign of God's mercy towards them.<sup>5</sup>

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The unhappy dispute between Smyth and the Corporation dragged on for several months, but eventually it was settled and agreed by all concerned – including Smyth – that he was no longer Lecturer at Lincoln. He went on to publish two small volumes of his discourses; one of four sermons on Psalm 22, in 1603, and the other an exposition of the (so-called) Lord's prayer. Although this latter volume came out in 1605, it was in fact the substance of sermons preached earlier when he was Lecturer in Lincoln. It is very clear that at this time – 1603 – he was most definitely a conforming Puritan and not in any way a Separatist. He did recognise the Separatists as brothers, but could not agree that the use of set prayer was sufficient grounds to leave the State Church. He also deplored their rejection of the Church of England as apostate. He wrote: 'Yet there are some, whom we will account brethren, though they do not so reckon us, seeing they have separated from us'.

However, events moved very swiftly for Smyth, a man always prepared to follow the truth as he saw it, wherever it led him and whatever the cost. He was no sluggard, and he never allowed difficulties to get in his way for long. Though the exact sequence of events is not clear, Smyth, when he was deposed from Lincoln in 1602, was a Church of England minister. But, by 1606, he was a Separatist. Indeed, he was a Separatist pastor. No wonder, since he was 'an eminent man in his time', one whom Bradford called 'a man of able gifts and a good preacher'.

How Smyth became a Separatist is not certain. After the trouble at Lincoln, he remained in the city for a while, possibly becoming a physician. Certainly, he travelled in the Midlands and conferred with

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<sup>5</sup> As before, for more on preaching, see my forthcoming book on Sandemanianism.

fellow-Puritans on the rightness of leaving a corrupt church. It is also known that for several months he was in doubt and suspense, being plagued with bouts of illness, even to the extent that ‘he lay sick unto death at the house of Helwys’ at one stage. He could not have been helped in his search for truth by the vacillations of his Puritan friend, Richard Bernard of Worksop. At one point, Bernard wanted to flee as an exile to the Continent; then he changed his mind and thought that he might form ‘a church within a church’ with the support of ‘a hundred godly persons from different parishes’, as he put it. But at long last, Bernard did make up his mind. The sanctions, which he knew the Church of England would impose upon him if he separated, proved too strong for this weak man. He eventually framed his feeble excuse after discussion with other preachers – including Thomas Helwys and John Robinson – saying: ‘I will return home and preach as I have done, and I must say, as Naaman did, the Lord be merciful to me in this thing’. Bernard makes only a fleeting appearance in the story a little later, in that he wrote an attack upon Separatism. But whatever the weakness of Bernard, Smyth was forged out of stronger material, and ‘he never fell back from any truth’ which he embraced. He separated from the Church of England in 1606, illegally, of course, thereby joining the Congregational church in Gainsborough. After a short while, he was chosen as its pastor.

Here is another challenge to us. Smyth sought to know God’s mind; when he understood what that was, he carried it out. He obeyed God whatever the cost, whatever his friends might or might not do. This is ever the way of the Christian. Reader, how do you respond to this?

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To gather the threads together: By 1606, the Gainsborough church had divided amicably into two, with one church at Gainsborough and the other at Scrooby. John Smyth was the pastor at Gainsborough. The Scrooby church had Richard Clyfton as its pastor, and John Robinson as its teacher, and it met in the house of William Brewster who provided hospitality for the thirty to forty members every Lord’s day. Both churches now suffered much abuse and persecution for their separation. The Scrooby church members, for instance, were forced to vary their meeting-place to avoid arrest because ‘in one place or another, exercising the worship of God... they could not long continue in any peaceable condition, but were hunted and persecuted on every side’. They were stalked and chased as animals, and a perpetual watch was kept on their homes. A warrant was issued for the taking of ‘William Brewster, of Scrooby, gentleman, for Brownism’; that is, Separatism. No wonder the Brewsters named their daughter who was born at this time, ‘Fear’. Some of the saints were caught and cast into

prison. The onslaught was so severe, their minds were turned towards Holland, where the Ancient church had settled some fourteen years before, and to which city more and more exiles from all over England were gravitating. Yet the thought of emigration was daunting in the extreme; obviously it would mean giving up home, employment and country. There was also the possibility that war might break out in the Low Countries in the near future. And what was the upheaval in aid of? What was it all for? To what end? Freedom to worship God and enjoy the ordinances of Christ as taught in Scripture!

They did not hesitate for long; they opted for biblical worship. Bradford recorded their crucial decision to quit England. He wrote:

Seeing themselves thus molested and that there was no hope of their continuance there, they resolved to go into the Low Countries, where they heard was freedom of religion for all men; as also how sundry from London, and other parts of the land had been exiled and persecuted for the same cause, and were gone thither and lived at Amsterdam and in other places of the land. So after they had continued together about a year, and kept their meetings every [Lord's day], in one place or other, exercising the worship of God among themselves, notwithstanding all the diligence and malice of their adversaries, they seeing they could no longer continue in that condition, they resolved to get over into Holland as they could, which was in the year 1607-1608.

The first of the two churches to leave was the one at Gainsborough – through Smyth's rapid and decisive action – probably about the end of 1606. Within a short while the Scrooby church followed. It was a momentous decision for them, as it had been for all the others. Bradford put it in this way:

It was [a big thing], and thought remarkable by many, that they should leave their native soil and country, their lands and livings, and all their friends and familiar acquaintances, to go into a country they only knew by hearsay, where they would have to learn a new language and get their living they knew not how, and that, too, in a land too often desolated by the miseries of war. It was especially hard for them since they had only been accustomed to a plain country life and the occupation of husbandry, and were entirely unfamiliar with such trade and commerce as that by which the land to which they were going did mainly flourish. But though these things did trouble them, they did not put them off, for they were bent on following God and enjoying his ordinances; they therefore relied on his providence and knew the one they trusted in.

But they were trapped! As it was illegal to worship God in the Separatist manner in England, so it was against the king's authority to leave the country. Since a licence was necessary to emigrate, and they did not possess the same, they had no lawful right of passage through ports and

harbours. Thus the captains and vessel owners could charge what they liked and the would-be exiles faced ‘large expenses’. Nevertheless, they were determined to go.

Brewster led the Scrooby church into exile in 1608. Their homes were broken up, and they were scattered. They hired a vessel at Boston, were betrayed, robbed of all their money, ‘rifled and ransacked’, searched ‘to their shirts for money, yea, even the women, further than became modesty’, and sent back to Scrooby. Here they were made ‘a spectacle and wonderment to the multitude, which came flocking on all sides to behold them’. They were ‘rifled and stripped of their money, books and much other goods’, presented to the magistrates and sentenced to prison. After a month the majority were released.

Nothing daunted, they tried again. The men walked fifty miles across country to the coast, while the women and children, being put aboard a small bark, were taken down the Trent and Humber rivers to a tiny creek. They were stranded by the tide, chased by the militia, whereupon the captain deserted them, leaving the women and children shivering in the cold on the sand bar at the mercy of the advancing soldiers, ‘a great company, both horse and foot, with bills and guns and other weapons’. The anguish was beyond description. ‘The poor men which [managed to get] on board were in great distress for their wives and children, which they saw thus to be taken, and were left destitute of their helps, and themselves also not having a cloth to [cover themselves] with, more than they had on their backs, and some scarce a penny about them, all they had being on the bark. It drew tears from their eyes, and anything they had they would have given to have been on shore again. But all in vain; there was no remedy; they must thus sadly part’.

Those who were on the ship when the captain sailed suffered dreadful storms, during which the mariners were terrified out of their wits, but the saints were full of hope, assured that God would deliver them. For seven out of the fourteen days at sea ‘they neither saw sun, moon, nor stars, and were driven to the coast of Norway; the mariners themselves often despairing of life, and once with shrieks and cries gave over all, as if the ship had been foundered in the sea, and they sinking without recovery. But when man’s hope and help wholly failed, the Lord’s power and mercy appeared for their recovery; for the ship rose again, and gave the mariners courage again to manage her’. The godly passengers with ‘fervent prayers... cried unto the Lord in this great distress, especially some of them, even without any great distraction’.

Notwithstanding the dreadful state of the women and children left on the sand bar, and their desperate condition, God graciously intervened for their deliverance. The rest of the church members were eventually

smuggled out of the country, so that by August, 1608, all were safely in Amsterdam, including Brewster, Robinson and Clyfton. Bradford recognised the hand of God in bringing good out of all their harrowing experiences. He wrote:

By these so public troubles in so many eminent places [Boston and other ports]... their cause became famous, and occasioned many to look into the same, and their godly carriage and Christian behaviour was such as left a deep impression in the minds of many.

Indeed, he was able to report that although the prospect of fearful sufferings made some think twice about going through with the business, ‘yet many more came on with fresh courage, and greatly animated others’. Hence in spite of all the difficulties, he could say that ‘they all got over at length, some at one time and some at another, and met together again, according to their desire, with no small rejoicing’.

Reader, this story of the English Separatists must make us stop and consider our own ways, must it not? Their bravery, their courage and their perseverance was outstanding. But it was the reason which lay behind their actions – their faith and determination to serve God – which stands out above all. They were totally committed to the worship of the Lord in his church in the way he has made known in Scripture. And that was that. It has been well said:

Thus they planned and executed. They left the land of their nativity. They braved the perils of an unknown ocean and a still more unknown future that they might find a refuge free from religious bondage and where they might worship God according to their conscience. This they accomplished in the face of almost insurmountable hardships.

Their exploits will never be forgotten; no, not as long as time shall last.

And in this way, three English Separatist churches were established in Amsterdam in 1608; the Ancient church, along with the newly-arrived Gainsborough and Scrooby churches. But as was explained in ‘Boiled Roots’, the Ancient church was already being torn apart with divisions and quarrels. What would happen now?

Think of the men who were in Amsterdam at this time – Francis Johnson, Henry Ainsworth, John Smyth, Richard Clyfton, William Brewster, William Bradford, John Robinson and the rest – men who were of the highest spiritual calibre. Their womenfolk, too, were ornaments to the gospel. How remarkable that they should all come together in Amsterdam. How wonderfully God’s providences combine! If Elizabeth and James had tolerated the Separatists, the ‘rebels’ would, perhaps, have remained scattered throughout England. But, by the madness of the last

Tudor and the first Stuart, they were forced through many sufferings and setbacks to meet up in the early 1600s on a foreign shore, crammed together like sardines in the city of Amsterdam. What is more, their many trials had served to strengthen their resolve to press on with the further reform of the church.

This was a gathering of some of the choicest, bravest saints the world has ever seen! Satan had done all he could to ruin the cause of Christ, but what he had succeeded in doing, under God's sovereign direction, was to bring together the most fertile and spiritual minds. And not only that. These vibrant minds were in bodies which would endure any pain, meet any cost, or suffer any hurt, to bring about the purity of the church. God raised a mighty army of English believers in the Low Countries in the early 1600s, a spiritual army prepared to fight with spiritual weapons in the battle to get the church back to the New Testament. Surely a tremendous surge for the reform of the church was about to break out.

It is easy to repeat it in our comfortable times, but it is true that the church is never stronger than when she is being persecuted. The State's apathetic tolerance of the church is to be feared, not its hatred. Worst of all is when the State fawns on the church, when Constantine dogmas rule the day, and the church becomes popular. A Christianity which is fashionable cannot be the religion of Jesus Christ. After all, his word stands:

Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven... Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets (Luke 6:22-26). Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

How easy it is to misread providences. We can misjudge the Lord. The Separatists must have wondered if God was pleased with them. If they were truly honouring God, why did so many troubles befall them? What was God's purpose in all their afflictions and losses? What a field-day the 'prosperity-gospel' teachers would have had with them! And yet that kind of interpretation of events would have been very wide of the mark. 'Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his works in vain', as William Cowper put it. Through all their tribulations, God brought these saints together in the Low Countries in order to accomplish wonders through them, wonders which will be spoken of until the end of the age. Their prospects must have looked bleak at times, but:

The LORD knows the way of the righteous... As for God, his way is perfect... Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he

*From Gainsborough to Amsterdam*

led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city for habitation (Ps. 1:6; 18:30; 107:5-7).

Reader, do you not feel a sense of comfort in this? Are you not rebuked for the times you have grumbled against God as you have misunderstood his purposes? Are we not all more or less guilty in this respect? How often we need to be reminded that ‘we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose’ (Rom. 8:28). We must do our duty as we find it in the Scriptures, and leave the consequences to God. Though our circumstances might appear dark and dreary, we must not base our assessments on them. The great day will declare it (1 Cor. 3:13; 4:1-5). Those who honour God, he will honour (1 Sam. 2:30). The men and women of the Gainsborough and Scrooby churches of the early 17th century most definitely came into that category.

## *Quicksilver*

I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus

Philippians 3:13-14

*Amsterdam, 1608 – the three English Separatist churches – Smyth eager for reform – accused of instability – his reply – separates from the Ancient church – his books – spirituality of worship – believer’s baptism*

By the early autumn of 1608, there were three English Separatist churches in the city of Amsterdam, each driven from their homeland by persecution to take refuge in the Low Countries because of the religious toleration there. The Ancient church had been in Amsterdam for more than ten years; Francis Johnson was its pastor and Henry Ainsworth its teacher. This church had flourished in Holland, but it was now racked by tragic disputes. Sadly, worse was to come, the grievous course of which we followed in ‘Boiled Roots’.

What of the other two English Congregational churches – the one from Gainsborough and the one from Scrooby? The Gainsborough church, which had arrived a few months before the other, had John Smyth as its pastor. The Scrooby church members had only very recently managed to come together again after being scattered during several months of torment at the hands of the persecuting authorities and their agents in England. This church recognised Richard Clyfton as its pastor and John Robinson as its teacher. William Brewster and William Bradford were two of its members.

The Scrooby church did not stay long in Amsterdam; the petty quarrels of the Ancient church, and the probable outbreak of disputes with John Smyth, were repugnant to men like John Robinson and William Bradford. They had no desire to get themselves embroiled in wrangles with the other Separatists, and so after about six months the Scrooby church moved again – this time to Leyden.

We have looked at what happened in the Ancient church – but what became of these two newcomers, the churches from Gainsborough and Scrooby? In their respective ways both would alter the course of church history, and do so radically. Thousands – if not millions – would have cause to bless God for what men like Smyth and Robinson accomplished. Reader, I have no hesitation in saying that *you* owe a great debt to them. Are you aware of it? First, what happened to the Gainsborough church?

As we have seen, John Smyth was always prepared to receive further scriptural light; indeed, he avidly sought to get back to the church pattern revealed in the New Testament. And not only did he receive more biblical understanding – he always followed, wherever it led him. In the previous chapter, we tried to keep up with the rapid changes which took place – about the turn of the century – in his understanding of church order. In Amsterdam, he went on in the same vein! He always kept an open mind, he was an eager seeker after truth, and above all he obeyed, whatever the cost. His conscience was very, very sensitive; so much so he could not live with himself if he thought that he was disobedient to the truth or embraced any error. His personal friendships and church ties always came a distant second with him; it was the truth and his close obedience to it which counted. Although a frail man in his body, he was endowed with tremendous spiritual courage, and he was prepared to alter his mind as increasing light came to him, and to do it without the slightest fear of man. For all the difficulties this presented to those around him, they loved him dearly, and often followed his many revisions of opinion, finding him a man possessed of a most endearing and attractive personality. Even when his changes eventually proved too much for them, and they could no longer follow but had to let him go, they were most unwilling to lose him. They said:

Yea, what would we not have endured, or done; would we not have lost all we had, yea, would we not have plucked out our eyes; would we not have laid down our lives?... And all our love was too little for him and not worthy of him.

Without doubt, some thought Smyth's open-mindedness really amounted to nothing less than instability, and this must have been a severe trial to them. One of his difficulties was that he had been reared and trained in the inexorable logical method of the universities of the day. It was not only a problem for Smyth; Francis Johnson and many others suffered from the same. Years before, Robert Browne had complained about 'the logic-chopping preachers' of the times. It was this training in logic which lead Smyth and his like to quibble, forever dividing and sub-dividing the ramifications of their arguments. His writings reflect a determination to push his conclusions to the limit and beyond. Yet, even though Smyth was well aware of what men thought of him and his several changes, he had a ready reply:

To change a false religion is commendable, and to retain a false religion is damnable. For a Turk to become a Jew, and a Jew a Papist, and a Papist a Protestant, are all commendable changes though they all of them befall one and the same person in one year, nay, if it were in one month.

On his arrival in Amsterdam, Smyth worked as a physician besides being a pastor. He took no payment for his spiritual labours, nor did he charge his poverty-ridden patients for their medical treatment. Money held no charm whatsoever for him, and he was as open-handed as he was open-minded, generous to a fault, ‘even stripping the clothes from his own back, that he might aid those needier than himself’.

About the time of his move to Amsterdam, despite all the difficulties he faced in the upheavals and persecutions in England, Smyth still managed to write and publish his *Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible Church* (the local church, he meant). In this book, he argued for the same church officers and the same local church order as Browne had done some years before. Very shortly after, Smyth published again, this time his *Parallels, Censures, and Observations*, in which he still held to Brownist views of church order and practice. This book was a reply to the published criticism of Separatism by his former friend, Richard Bernard of Worksop. It will be recalled that this Bernard was the Puritan minister who could not bring himself to leave the Church of England for fear of persecution, even though he sympathised with the Separatist position at the time. Having gone back on his convictions, he then became a bitter critic of Separatist principles, and he went so far as to publish his censures. This in turn brought the reply from Smyth.

These two books by Smyth were written by the beginning of 1608, when fellowship between the Gainsborough church and the Ancient church was as yet unbroken. However, a few months later, Smyth with about eighty others broke fellowship with the Ancient church. He gave his reasons for this drastic step in another book, *The Differences of the Churches of the Separation*, which was published in the same year, 1608. It will be remembered that Smyth had been taught by Johnson – the current pastor of the Ancient church – when he was a student at Cambridge about twenty years before. But clearly he was not overawed by his former master and tutor, being quite prepared to disagree with him, and put his views into print. The basis for this separation from the Ancient church mainly concerned the nature of worship. In addition, Smyth also argued for the equality of the elders within a church. This was important because of the controversies which were raging in the Ancient church over this very question and other associated matters. For example: Does the rule in a church lie with the members or with the elders? A further point raised by Smyth in this book of the ‘differences’ concerned the giving of money for the maintenance of the work of the church, which he claimed to be a part of worship, and therefore the responsibility of the church members only. But it was the nature of worship which was the main point of disagreement.

Smyth admitted that the Ancient church had recovered the New Testament order, but he claimed that it had failed to appreciate the proper nature of worship, which must be spiritual in all respects. Developing this theme in his book, he came to the view that the use of printed words in worship is wrong, it being akin to the use of the signs and ceremonies of the Old Testament. These, of course, have been abolished by Christ, and are no part of New Testament worship. They are completely out of place in the church. From this, Smyth went on to contend that the use of the written word in worship is wrong. He pointed out that Christ closed the book before he preached (Luke 4:20), from which Smyth argued what he saw as a principle; namely, that the minister must have no book with him when preaching, not even a translation of Scripture. Instead, he must ‘prophesy’ (preach, he meant) directly by the Spirit. It is proper for a minister to use a translation in his preparation, he allowed, but not when actually engaged in preaching. Rather, he must take the original Hebrew and Greek with him into the pulpit, and translate as he goes along by the help of the Spirit of God. The original is inspired and, Smyth declared, the minister must bring this vital element of inspiration into his preaching by means of spontaneous translation. Smyth thought he found support for his views from the indisputable fact that the New Testament churches did not have all the books of Scripture. Obviously so! Hence they needed a prophetic ministry in those days. But from this he deduced that something of the same is needed in all generations, and that as a consequence there is no warrant for the church to use translations of the Bible in worship today. There must be a clear reliance upon the direct communication of the Holy Spirit, he said. Further, he argued, since it is only the original which is inspired, translations – being mere human productions – are as out of place in worship as set prayer or read sermons. Therefore, he claimed, there is no place for a liturgy, a homily or a psalm book in worship. Above all, the main point which Smyth contended for was this directness of the Holy Spirit’s influence in worship; nothing should be allowed to hinder it.

What is to be made of this? Is it to be dismissed as utter madness? Smyth was wrong about translations – it is obvious that the writers of Scripture often quoted other parts of the Bible from versions like the Septuagint, for instance – versions which had been translated out of the original language. This simple fact would seem to knock his arguments on the head. Smyth was pedantic, and it was yet another example of his rigid logic blinding him to sanctified common sense. He also emphasised the direct influence of the Spirit to such an extent that he was in danger of belittling the written word. It is an error which has been repeated time and again in the history of the church; it makes its appearance in various guises. Quakers, for example, have been guilty of it with their talk of the

‘inner light’. The French Prophets, too, spoke of inspiration. Likewise modern-day Charismatics dabble with it. The truth is the Holy Spirit speaks today through his written word, which is still his word even when it is translated into the common tongue. Smyth was himself inconsistent – why was it alright to use a translation in study but not in preaching?

But I ask again: Is Smyth’s argument to be dismissed as entirely crazy? No! Most decidedly, no! That being said, clearly he went too far, but even so, Smyth’s views ought not to be rejected out of hand. They contain some very important ideas which can teach us something about the wrongness of dead, formal, academic and merely intellectual orthodoxy in worship, especially in preaching. I have just implied that Smyth pushed his logic too far and thus ended up in a ridiculous, not to say, dangerous position. As I said, he even verged towards the error of advocating direct communication by the Holy Spirit, independent of Scripture, which is a most decidedly wrong position to adopt. But having said that, we must have vigour, life and a sense of God speaking to us in and through the preacher. It is a vital note which is too often absent these days. Smyth was afraid of quenching the Spirit by reliance upon paper, but he pushed his logic to the extreme and in this he was mistaken.

Yet even then, about eighty other church members did agree with him. And I ask again: Did he not have a point? Can preachers be too tied to their notes? Can preaching become dry, academic, arid – in all honesty, downright boring? If so, it is tragic! Preaching should be lively, fervent, and earnest by the Spirit of God. The hearers ought to be given a sense that God is speaking to them in living words. Paper can get in the way, can it not? And paper has a very dry taste! Granted that Smyth went too far, do we not err in the other direction these days? In short, do we not have too many theological lectures delivered by academic theorists, and not enough living, fervent sermons preached by earnest preachers who clearly have the unction of the Holy Spirit upon them? We want light; but we want fire as well.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, Smyth’s arguments, heavily based on iron logic, badly affected – and affected for many years – the churches which followed his teaching. The results were grim.

In March, 1609, Smyth showed that he had moved yet again when he published another book, *The Character of the Beast*. If the previous book had been remarkable, this time the shift was earth-shattering. In this latest work, he contended that the New Testament method of admission into church life is by water baptism which follows upon repentance and faith. He went on to argue that infants should not be baptised because there is no

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<sup>1</sup> Once again, see my forthcoming book on Sandemanianism.

command for it, nor any example of it in the New Testament. Also, he reminded his readers, Christ commanded his disciples to spread the gospel by preaching, bringing sinners to faith, which in turn is to be followed by baptism; not the other way round. In other words, the practice of infant baptism reverses Christ's order, he said. Infant baptisers baptise infants whom they *hope* will believe. The New Testament method is to baptise only those – and all of those – who *do* believe. The almost universally held system of infant baptism which Smyth was confronting put baptism *before* faith, whereas the New Testament always puts baptism *after* faith, which then leads on to church life. For example, Christ commanded his disciples:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:19-20). Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

The apostles certainly carried this out, and to the letter. They never changed the order. It was always faith followed by baptism followed by church membership. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, dealt with sinners who came under conviction of sin through his preaching. He urged them to repent and be baptised. As he called the people to 'be saved' it is recorded:

Then those who gladly received his word were baptised; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:41-42).

Evidences of regeneration always preceded baptism in the New Testament (Acts 8:12; 8:36-38; 9:17-18; 10:47; 16:14-15; 16:30-34; 18:8). It was the uniform practice of the apostles to baptise those – and only those – who believed. Salvation comes through faith; baptism follows and this leads into church life. There is no exception to this; there is never any change in the order in the New Testament.

The step which John Smyth took – and the church with him – was revolutionary. The Anabaptists had taken it ninety years before, of course, and now that Smyth came to it, he – like them – found the whole weight of the Papacy and the Reformed Churches bearing down upon him. In addition, Smyth had to contend with stiff opposition from fellow-Separatists like Johnson and Robinson – men who were very able in argument – but he had courage enough to stand for the truth and go back to the New Testament. Tradition was against him; the vast majority of Christians were against him; all his upbringing and education was against him; the political authorities were against him. But it did not matter. Truth

was truth. The Gainsborough church, under his teaching, examined the Scriptures on baptism, came to the conviction that they had been mistaken in their practice, and they were prepared to reform themselves according to the light they now saw. What a wonderful spirit!

The stand which the church made was of such importance, and its consequences so far-reaching, the background to it must be examined somewhat more closely. The question was not merely(!) a question of baptism. Rather, the whole basis of church membership and its life was at stake, as it still is. These are no mean issues. Hence we must make some effort to examine the views and practices of infant baptisers. Smyth had to overcome their arguments. First in himself, because of his former life-long practice of infant baptism; then in the writings of his many opponents. The reform of the church being a vital matter, it is necessary to look at the issues involved in a little more detail. This I have done in my *Infant Baptism Tested* and my *Baptist Sacramentalism* – which see.

Meanwhile, taking that detailed examination for granted in this present volume, we shall now go on to trace the steps taken by Smyth and his friends in the Gainsborough church as they moved to recover New Testament church order and practice with regard to baptism and all that comes from it.

## *Back to England*

In the name of our God we will set up our banners... Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God

Psalm 20:5-7

*Amsterdam, 1609 – the exiled Gainsborough Congregational church becomes a Baptist church – earlier Baptists – the Anabaptists – Smyth criticised – his reply – applies to join the Anabaptists – Helwys – disagrees with Smyth – his reasons – a division – Smyth's last days – raises the issue of toleration – the Arminianism of Smyth and Helwys – Helwys brings the church under his care back to England – the first Baptist church in England – a General Baptist church – Helwys' efforts for reform – the principle of toleration – Busher – plea for tolerance – persecution of the Baptists*

In 1609, John Smyth came to the view that infant baptism is wrong, that it is contrary to the New Testament practice of the baptism of believers only. Having come to this understanding, the Gainsborough church which was now settled in Amsterdam, under Smyth, drew the logical inference that the infant baptism which they had received in the Church of England was no baptism at all, and they needed to be baptised properly. But not only that, they had failed miserably in what they had been trying to do, which was to reform the church, and set up the New Testament order. They came to realise that baptism is inseparably linked to church life; it is not only a personal and private matter for the individual. They saw that their baptism as infants, and the teaching which went with it, had effectively obscured, if not obliterated, this scriptural emphasis. As a result, they needed to think through the whole question of church life right from the beginning. Their intentions had been good, but they had gone astray from the very start in that they had not used the New Testament method to become a church. To put it bluntly, the Gainsborough church was not founded properly. There was only one thing for it – they must begin all over again!

It is almost certain that Smyth was influenced by the Mennonites (Anabaptists) in Amsterdam, but even though the Anabaptists had been baptising believers, and not infants, for nearly ninety years, he did not think it right to join them. The atrocities of Munster, and the fact that the Mennonites were infected with the erroneous Hofmannite view of the person of Christ, meant that Smyth felt he had nobody to turn to. As a consequence, the Gainsborough church decided to act independently, and return to the New Testament order on their own. Therefore, the officers

gave up their positions, and the church disbanded itself to let all the members become private individuals once again. There is some uncertainty about exactly what happened next. Since their many enemies tried to paint the church in the worst possible light, Smyth was always labelled a ‘self-baptiser’, but it is possible, even probable, that Thomas Helwys baptised Smyth, who then baptised all the rest. In this way, they rejected not only infant baptism, but they also rejected the covenant method of forming a church, as they now saw church membership in terms of the baptism of believers. The church when originally formed at Gainsborough in the early 1600s had used the covenant method, as previously explained. Nevertheless, when a church is formed, both believer’s baptism and the principles of the covenant method should be involved, surely? However, the church was now reconstituted as a Baptist church, set up on the basis that all the members freely professed personal and individual faith in Christ. It was a voluntary business from start to finish; no one was compelled to act against his conscience. At this stage, they baptised by affusion, or pouring, after the manner of the Mennonites.

It must not be thought that Smyth was the first of the English Separatists to reject infant baptism; the question of the baptism of believers, as opposed to that of infants, was certainly raised among them before 1609. For instance, it is known that an Englishman baptised himself and others in Amsterdam some time before 1600. Also it is possible that John Penry had practiced believer’s baptism, and it has even been asserted that he baptised by immersion. Certainly, he was charged ‘with Anabaptistry’, sneeringly dubbed ‘a notorious Anabaptist, of which party he was the leader’. Of course, this may have meant no more than ‘scum’ or ‘worthless’ in the sarcastic jargon of the day. It is true to say that in 1588 he was urging the Welsh not to let ‘hirelings’ baptise their children – rather, they should travel ‘a thousand miles to a true minister of God’. And in his last memorial, he disclaimed ‘Anabaptistry’. Even so, it may well be that Penry himself had been a Baptist.

This real or imagined link with the Anabaptists – who were much abused and discredited on all sides – was a convenient scourge to use against any who dared to question infant baptism and examine the New Testament on the subject. In many cases, that was an end to all discussion on the matter! To snap out the word ‘Anabaptist’ was enough. Therefore, it is probable that some early Separatists shied away from looking into baptism, on the grounds that they did not wish to be lumped together with the discredited fanatics of Munster, however unfair that might be on the majority of Anabaptists. Unfair? Frankly, it was a vile slur and a lie, another proof of the adage that truth is always the first casualty of war. Even so, the Anabaptists undoubtedly contributed to their own troubles.

For instance, the mistaken views of the person of Christ held by some of them further encouraged the Separatists to keep their distance for perfectly understandable and proper reasons; not least, many Baptists for years to come would take the utmost pains to deny all connection with the ‘heretics’. The truth is, the issue is very complicated and difficult to resolve, especially at this distance. The men of Munster certainly did immense damage to the ‘mainstream’ Anabaptist cause, and those who took the Hofmannite stance on Christ were justly to be censured. In a sense, the Anabaptists were their own worst enemies.

But, whatever others might or might not do, Smyth was not the sort of man to shirk anything, whatever it cost, no matter what any might say of him. And once he was convinced, as usual he went all the way. It was all or nothing with Smyth. What is more, now that it was established, the cause of believer’s baptism rapidly gained ground. Smyth and his friends charted the way, and others followed on apace, greatly encouraged by the boldness of the pioneers and convinced by their arguments. Francis Johnson, in 1617, complained of the growing popularity of believer’s baptism, bemoaning ‘how greatly it spreads both in Holland and England’.

It will be no surprise to learn that Smyth came in for bitter criticism for this change of opinion and practice – yet another – and one so emotive as the rejection of infant baptism, and its replacement by believer’s baptism. Very much so! He was flying directly in the face of received opinion, was he not? He was pulling against the tide of almost universal infant baptism, a tide which had been flowing strongly for about fourteen hundred years. He – John Smyth – was daring to break with the overwhelming majority, to throw in his lot with the likes of the despised and rejected Anabaptists against the Papists and all the Reformed Churches. Odium was heaped upon the man. He was a crank and worse; he was a heretic; he was... words failed! Even the usually gracious John Robinson ‘was unworthy of himself in his controversy with the Baptists’, calling all Anabaptists ‘vile heretics and schismatics’. But Smyth was undaunted. To his many critics he had a ready reply. It was unanswerable. He calmly said:

That we should fall from the profession of Puritanism to Brownism, and from Brownism to true Christian baptism is not simply evil or reprovable in itself, except it be proved that we have fallen from true religion. If we therefore, being formerly deceived in the way of infant baptism, now do embrace the truth in the true Christian apostolic baptism, then let no man impute this as a fault unto us.

He was asked for his Scripture support for self-baptism. In reply to the Anglicans, he quoted the Prayer Book by which they allowed a man to administer the Lord’s supper to himself. Certainly he was on tricky ground here, but whenever men attempt to go back to the start, difficult decisions

have to be taken. What do you think of the question, reader? It really comes down to the way you look at apostolic succession. The point is, apostolic succession comes not through men, but through obedience to the truth (2 Tim. 2:2). The connection with the apostles, the spiritual chain, does not come down through men by means of a physical touch – the laying on of hands – it comes down through the generations by our obedience to apostolic teaching. When men obey Scripture, this constitutes the real and only union with the apostles.

But the question of the link between contemporary and apostolic practice would prove to be an issue which would cause much debate and heart searching for many Separatists during the next thirty years, and not only for Smyth. He was also challenged on another but associated point. He was asked why he did not go to the Mennonites – the Waterlanders – for baptism. What possessed him to have the audacity to start all over again? This enquiry forced him to take another look at the Anabaptists. The next step in his rapid journey followed soon after.

Smyth came to the conclusion that the Mennonites were a true church, and their baptism was valid after all. He now felt he had been wrong to set up a new Baptist church when one already existed close by. Completely open and utterly sincere, he confessed his error, as he now saw it, in the way he had been baptised and had formed the new church. Then, with forty-one others, he applied for membership of the Waterlanders' church. In so doing, he gave a list of ‘the names of the English who acknowledge their error and repent of it, *viz.*, that they took in hand to baptise themselves, contrary to the order laid down by Christ: and who now desire henceforth to be united to a true church of Christ as speedily as possible’.

All the same, the Waterlanders would not be hurried. They were courteous, but they quietly let the application stand in abeyance for a while. Quite a while!

What is more, not all the members of the English Baptist church were in agreement with this approach to the Anabaptists. Indeed, things reached such a pitch, Thomas Helwys and ten others parted company with Smyth over the application to join the Waterlanders, since they retained the doubts they all had entertained at one time over the Hofmannite theology of the Mennonites. Helwys also raised the thorny question of succession once again. He said that Smyth was falling back into a false notion of apostolic succession by this feeling that he ought to have gone to the Anabaptists just because they were already in existence. Helwys saw it as a vital issue of principle, and on this basis he and his followers excommunicated Smyth, and proclaimed themselves the true Baptist church. Helwys was very greatly concerned over this matter of succession, and rightly so. He asked:

Has the Lord thus restrained his Spirit, his word and ordinances as to make particular men lords over them, or keepers of them? God forbid. This is contrary to the liberty of the gospel, which is free for all men, at all times and in all places.

This was – and is – an important issue. We shall meet it again. How can believers go back to any New Testament practice and recover it, if and when it has been lost? Besides which, Helwys had something else in mind, other questions arising out of this issue of succession. Who can form a church? Who can appoint elders? What is their authority for so doing? He wanted straight answers. Confronting Smyth he said: ‘And now for the other question, that elders must ordain elders; or if this be a perpetual rule, then from whom is your eldership come? And if one church might once ordain, then why not all churches always?’ Smyth was going back to the Anabaptists – but how did the Anabaptists themselves form their church in Zurich in 1525? To whom did they go? And if *they* had had the right to go back directly to the New Testament in order to recover the apostolic pattern as they saw it, why did the English not have the same right now? Must we always go through other men? Do we need other men’s approval to validate our obedience to Scripture?

This was another vital and practical question. It remains so. How are churches to be formed after a time of general defection? Of course, if churches are prospered by God and divide amicably, all well and good. That is relatively easy and straightforward; the problem does not arise. That is what happened at Gainsborough, as we have seen, and we shall meet it again in the coming pages. But what steps need to be taken if men want to go back to the New Testament at a time when the spiritual climate is against them? That is the real predicament. That question, too, may yet have to be faced in the coming years. Reader, it needs to be thought about. It might well come to the forefront once more, if the current spiritual decline goes on. What will happen if the present apostasy gathers pace and proves to be widespread? How will believers of a future generation go back to the New Testament and form a church? Indeed, how does a body of believers actually become a church? It is all very well to live where a church exists, a church which is worthy of the name, that is. But what can be done if such happy circumstances do not prevail? Moving to a locality where a true church exists is possible and may be right – yes. But can a church not be formed afresh? Must we always call upon an existing church to approve the setting up of another? If so, where did that existing church itself come from? These were the kind of questions which Smyth and Helwys debated with vigour.

The Baptist church with Smyth as pastor held their meetings in a part of the Great Cake House – a bakery owned by one of the Mennonites. But the

move did not mark the start of extended prosperity for the church, since Smyth did not have long to live. Even so, he was busy to the last, drawing up a long *Declaration of Faith* for the church, in which he accounted for its doctrine and practice. Following reform over baptism, they now believed that only those who are properly baptised should receive the Lord's supper. In doctrine, also, Smyth showed he was even yet on the move. It is sad to have to report that he gave up his long-held Calvinism to adopt the tenets of Arminianism which was rampant in the Low Countries at the time.

But Smyth in his last days also took another step of the highest significance – one which would have far-reaching consequences. He framed a written appeal for religious liberty, pleading that men ought not to be forced to believe or practice anything in religion by the power of the magistrate or through fear of punishment. By this document, he was probably the first Englishman to form a proper argument for toleration. This is a signal honour which belongs to him, and his memory ought never to fade, if for no other reason.

Toleration is a most important principle. Smyth put forward the New Testament doctrine that the civil magistrate has no power to interfere in spiritual matters, but his role is entirely civil. You will recall how often this point has come up in these pages. Thousands of men, women and children down the ages have been murdered – yes, murdered – by those who followed Constantine and used the sword of the civil magistrate to try to enforce a uniform religion. The Swiss Anabaptists and their followers had spoken against it in 1525 and onwards, but the vast majority swept on, heedless. Henry Jacob's *Humble Supplication* of 1605 or thereabouts (see later) did not reach the clarity of understanding shown by Smyth's appeal for tolerance, since Jacob continued to allow the power of the sovereign in 'overseeing, ruling, and censuring particular churches'. He even saw civil officers as those who should be responsible for the proceedings of the churches. Barrowe, Greenwood and Penry had also allowed the supremacy of the Crown over church affairs. Smyth rejected all such notions. He went the whole hog. He wanted full liberty, the end of all State interference in church concerns. And he was unquestionably right according to the New Testament. It has been well said:

It is the singular and distinguished honour of the Baptists to have repudiated, from their earliest history, all coercive power over the consciences and actions of men with reference to religion. No sentence is to be found in all their writings inconsistent with those principles of Christian liberty and willingness which are now equally dear to all the free... churches... They were the proto-evangelists of the voluntary principle.

Other similar testimonies may be adduced. 'Not to the Church of England, nor to Scottish Presbyterianism, nor English Puritanism at large does the

honour of the first perception of the full principle of liberty of conscience and its first assertion in English speech belong. That honour has to be assigned... to the Baptists'. Another said that 'freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first the trophy of the Baptists'. Let honour be paid to whom honour is due (Rom. 16:7 and Phil. 2:29). It is significant that all three testimonies here quoted come from non-Baptist writers. Smyth's various principles were laughed at in his day, and even now his stance on the many issues he tackled is vilified in some quarters. Yet, if he had done nothing else, his plea for tolerance by itself would have earned him an esteemed place in the hearts of millions.

Smyth died of consumption on the 1st of September, 1612, after seven lingering weeks of a last illness. He was utterly worn out, even though he had only reached his early forties, since his constitution had always been delicate. Nevertheless, he had never allowed his natural frailty to hinder his continual efforts for Christ. And what mammoth efforts they had been; how much he had packed into his few turbulent years. What a challenge his memory still presents to us. During his last months he took care to instruct his children and comfort his wife, but he now refused to enter into argument with anyone. A man of fervent love and deep spirituality, even as he drew near to death he published yet again, this time a highly personal document.

In *The Last Book of John Smyth called the Retraction of his Errors*, he saluted all Christians of whatever communion, and grieved over the many divisions in Christ's kingdom. He candidly owned the bad tone of his writings, and was sorry for it. He utterly denounced his past censures of the Brownists and of the Church of England in particular. Though he could not retract his views with a good conscience, he said, nevertheless he took back all his 'biting and bitter words, phrases and speeches', as he expressed it. He indicated that if he lived he would have nothing more to do with controversy over outward church matters, but would concentrate only on those things which concerned salvation. In this, there is some evidence that he was moving his position yet again – this time to a very loose attachment to all ordinances and church organisation. Also, he was beginning to waver on the doctrine of the human nature of the person of Christ; perhaps the Hofmannite views were becoming attractive to him. How he would have gone on if he had lived, who can say? He would not have stagnated, that much we can be sure of. He would die weary but without a trace of rust upon him.

Smyth was never received into church membership by the Mennonites. This is quite understandable from their point of view. No doubt, they were wary of his frequent and rapid changes, perhaps shocked by them, as were many others. He certainly must have given the impression that he was

unstable. Eventually, the Dutch church submitted a doctrinal statement for the applicants to consider, but nevertheless the Waterlanders continued to proceed only slowly. It was as late as January, 1615, that thirty-one of the candidates from the English Baptist church were eventually admitted into the Mennonite communion. After a time, they learned the Dutch language, intermarried and were lost as a separate community.

Four Confessions of faith still exist as records of the theology of Smyth and Helwys. The first and third are the earliest English Baptist creeds. By these documents, it is clear that both Smyth and Helwys had become Arminians. They came to deny the doctrine of original sin and God's hatred of the sinner; they asserted that predestination means mere foreknowledge, that God does not predetermine but merely foresees; they said that Christ died for all men. It is clear that both Smyth and Helwys had been badly infected with the teaching of Arminius, who had died in 1609. Not only that, they were probably further influenced by the Pelagian views held by the Mennonites. In addition, at the time a growing number of books were being published in favour of the Arminian cause, and it is very likely that they too had their grievous effect on the pair of Baptist teachers.

The blunt truth is, all this time back in England the pernicious doctrines of Arminianism had been gaining ground, as I explained when dealing with King James. It had started long before. In his position as the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, Peter Baro had advocated Arminian views at Cambridge towards the end of the 16th century. Remarkably, Baro had been ordained (allowing the word) by Calvin himself in Geneva in 1560. In 1596, however, a complaint had been lodged against the Cambridge professor to the effect that for some 'fourteen or fifteen years (he had) taught in his lectures, preached in sermons, determined in the Schools and printed in several books divers points of doctrine... agreeable to the errors of Popery'. Eventually, he had come to champion the notion of a universal atonement and to oppose the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's irresistible call. 'Christ died for all men, for the sins of the whole world', he claimed. Hence, under the teaching of men like Baro, the Church of England had been going down into Arminianism for a considerable time. It will be remembered how John Overall had spoken openly in favour of it at Hampton Court. Laud, who was now rising in power in the State Church, was a rigid, determined Arminian and a virtual Papist. The political masters of the nation, including the king himself, also encouraged the development of Arminianism. For all these reasons, the doctrinal climate of England was changing in the early years of the 17th century, and changing rapidly. Revolution was in the air. This was the background to the rise of the first English Baptist churches. They came on the scene just

as Arminianism was gaining popularity in Holland and England, and they adopted it as their creed.

On the other hand, the House of Commons in England was strongly Calvinistic – as were the Separatists, apart from Smyth and Helwys and the churches with them, that is. No wonder the two Baptists were strongly criticised by many for their ‘gross and damnable Arminianism’.

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Not long after his separation from Smyth, Helwys became convinced that it would be cowardly of him to continue to think of his own safety and thus remain out of England. There was great need at home because, as he put it, ‘thousands of ignorant souls in our own country were perishing for lack of instruction’, since very many fine ministers of the gospel had been exiled under the measures of James, stemming from his harangue at Hampton Court. As a consequence, Helwys quitted Amsterdam in 1611-12 to bring the Baptist church under his charge – a church of ten or so members – back to London, even though they all realised that persecution, prison or worse, awaited them. Things were a little easier in England at this time, it is true. As I have explained, Bancroft had died, and King James had appointed Abbot as Archbishop, a man somewhat more inclined to favour the Puritan cause. It will be recalled that this appointment was a mere political ploy by the Crown, seeing it suited the purpose of the king for a while because he wished to keep a check on the rise of Popery; but only for a while! Even so, this relative relaxation must not be taken to mean that Separatists, including Baptists, might now expect an easy life on their return. Far from it. Nevertheless, despite the threat which hung over them, a threat which made things very difficult for Helwys and his friends, they ‘continued their church state and assemblies for worship as publicly as the evils of the time would admit’. This church therefore became the first General or Arminian Baptist church in England. They met in Newgate Street, Spitalfields, just outside the City.

The early Baptists were deeply committed to the principle of the gathered church, based upon Matthew 18:20, the words of Christ, who said: ‘For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them’, speaking of the church (Matt. 18:17). Helwys and his friends certainly held this view, and did so staunchly. In the twenty-seven articles of *The English Declaration* drawn up in 1611 in Amsterdam, they said:

That though in respect of Christ, the church be one (Eph. 4:4), yet it consists of various particular congregations, even so many as there shall be in the world, every of which congregation, though they be but two or three, have Christ

given them, with all the means of their salvation (Matt. 18:20; Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 3:22), are the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27) and a whole church (1 Cor. 14:23). And therefore may, and ought, when they are come together, to pray, [preach], break bread, and administer in all the holy ordinances, although as yet they have no officers, or that their officers should be in prison, or sick, or by any other means hindered from the church (1 Pet. 4:10; 2:5)... And therefore no church ought to challenge any prerogative over any other.

This was an important statement. It shows an advance upon the Ancient church, in that the Baptists regarded the church as more important than its officers. The Baptists had broken away from the notion that the presence of the pastor is essential for the church to function. But they were also one with John Robinson in the view that the smallest church – two or three members – was nevertheless a complete church, possessing all the scriptural powers given to Christ's churches. They understood the New Testament principle that each church is a true church, a whole church; it is not made so by association with other churches under an external authority, ecclesiastical courts, or federations and the like. Each church is accountable for its own affairs and answerable to Christ alone, they believed. It is to be feared that these principles are being compromised and lost in these days, perhaps by neglect. They are certainly under attack. Sadly, denominationalism is very much alive; the love of the trappings of federation and association has not died. The 'head-office' mentality is not unknown even in Baptist or Separatist churches, when they cling to the concept of church union of one kind or another, bolstered by the full panoply of secretariats, committees and appointed leaders. They think they can hold their own with the best of them by these means. Such goings-on are not far removed from the notion of The Church of England or The Presbyterian Church. All these shenanigans are entirely without scriptural foundation. Separatists – Baptists especially – should avoid them like the plague.

Helwys made other very important contributions to the advance of the battle to recover the New Testament church, for he, like Smyth, was a doughty champion of religious toleration. He soon published a book, *The Mystery of Iniquity*, in which showed his attitude to kings in general and to James in particular. He bravely but correctly wrote:

The king is a mortal man and not God: therefore has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual lords over them... Our lord the king is but an earthly king, and he has no authority as a king but in earthly causes... men's religion is betwixt God and themselves... Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.

I said his words showed bravery. They certainly did. For this scriptural statement concerning the liberty of men's conscience, Helwys was cast into prison. Almost certainly he never got out, but died there in 1616, after which John Murton became the pastor of the church. But by then four other General Baptist churches had been formed and were in fellowship with the church in Newgate Street; churches at Lincoln, Sarum, Coventry and Tiverton. A little after the death of Helwys, it is possible that the church in Spitalfields moved back to Amsterdam and joined the Mennonites, but some say that it continued in London to the end of the 18th century, possibly longer.

Helwys was a man noted for his practical zeal, one who was far removed from being a mere theorist; he was a man of action. John Robinson said that it was Helwys, most of all, who had influenced the Gainsborough church to flee to Holland in 1607. He added, quaintly, 'if any brought oars, he brought sails'.<sup>1</sup> It was Helwys who provided the money required for the church to emigrate. Perhaps his greatest work is to be discovered in his stand for religious tolerance and the liberty of conscience. His efforts in this field bore much fruit. It has been claimed, and rightly so, that from this first Baptist church in England, with its 'little dingy meeting-house', the doctrine of religious liberty spread far and wide, in a time when this view was regarded as heretical, and when those who taught it met with severe punishment at the hands of the merciless agents of the State and Church.

A member of the Spitalfields church, Leonard Busher, published a tract on the subject of tolerance in 1614; it was entitled *Religion's Peace or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience*. His thesis was revolutionary for the time. Busher argued it should be lawful for all men, including Jews and Papists, to publish any matter concerning religion, 'always provided they allege no Fathers for proof of any point in religion, but only the Holy Scriptures'. Who can fault Busher's basic thrust? Even so, it was a direct contradiction of the Star Chamber Decree in two ways. The claim itself was contrary to that edict; and even to publish, whatever the work, was against the law. Stern times they were in which the early Baptists flourished; yes, and foolish times, too. The hard fact is, apart from the Anabaptists, liberty of conscience was opposed by everyone else – including the Puritans – who continued to argue that the magistrate must preserve order in the church, and preserve it by force. Smyth, Helwys and Busher and the rest of them certainly were made to feel the weight of the oppressive regime under

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<sup>1</sup> See the Appendix of my *Baptist Sacramentalism*, where I quote from Helwys' *The Mystery of Iniquity* at length. I do this to refute the claim that Helwys was a sacramentalist. The point of interest here, however, lies in the fact that Helwys had, among others, Robinson in his sights in that book.

which they lived. They knew what intolerance meant, and knew it at first-hand! Religious liberty was an idea hated by the vast majority of Christians, let alone pagan politicians and carnal State Church leaders. And that hatred was easily transferred from the principle itself to the people who spoke up for it.

The plea for toleration by the General Baptists arose out of their Arminian view of Christ's universal atonement, which, they said, was accomplished in order that all men might be saved. From that false premise, they proceeded to argue rightly that it is wrong to kill a man for his errors, and consequently take away all hope of his salvation. As the Anabaptists had been saying for nearly a century – to kill a Turk is no way to convert him. This kind of statement may seem obvious today, but it was totally unacceptable in the early 1600s. Reader, we owe our liberty to the foresight and courage of men like Smyth, Helwys and Busher. It is shameful that they are derided or forgotten by many who have entered into the fruit of their labours, by many who very often take it all for granted. It is only fair to their memory to say that these Arminian Baptists reached the scriptural position on liberty before the Calvinists did.

Besides their Arminian views, perhaps their emphasis upon the voluntary principle of believer's baptism, as opposed to infant baptism, also might have led directly to their view of toleration and liberty. In the rite of infant baptism, the infant has an unconscious participation in it all. To become a Baptist – as to become a Christian – a sinner has to take a personal and willing step as an individual; he cannot be forced by external pressure to believe in Christ. It would be interesting and profitable to explore this suggestion of a link between believer's baptism and tolerance.

The fact is, and for whatever reason, despite the Calvinists' biblical understanding of the doctrines of grace, it would take them a little longer before they saw the principle of religious liberty. Some would take many years to come to it. The Puritans of New England, in particular, were very slow to reach the New Testament position. Roger Williams, a Baptist who was treated disgracefully by them, wrote a book in 1644 on the bloodthirsty nature of their enforcement of religion. He called it *Persecution for the Cause of Conscience*. He declared that 'truth must have no sword, helmet, breastplate, shield or horse but what is spiritual and of a heavenly nature'. Are these words not true? Of course they are! But those who clung tenaciously to the Constantine view refused for a long time to accept the principles of toleration. Nor was the doctrine of religious enforcement a mere theory with them. Far from it – they put the vile system into full effect wherever they could. And we may not have seen the end of it yet. Is there any danger that some would do the same today, and

enforce some kind of religious uniformity, given the chance? I fear it is very possible.

Reader, there is a place for both tolerance and intolerance in the spiritual realm. What? Yes, it is so. We must be highly intolerant *inside* the church, where we must discipline and enforce New Testament principles *on ourselves* with vigour, but using only spiritual weapons, of course. But we must be highly tolerant *outside* the church, in the sense of letting other men be free in their religious opinions and practices. Once they have committed themselves to join the church with us, tolerance must give way to intolerance, in the context in which I write; but not before. The trouble is, some Christians want these two reversed. They would like to enforce their particular view of Christianity upon pagans – or get others to do it for them – while allowing laxity and licence, a virtual free-for-all, within the church. It will not do! The sad fact is, too many Baptists – of all people! – are forgetting the biblical stand of their forefathers. I shall return to this serious point.

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It was not easy to be a Baptist in the reign of King James. Those who held the minority view suffered very severely right from the start. In 1620, one of their number issued a statement which gave details of their many and grievous afflictions. He called it: *A most Humble Supplication of many of the king's Majesty's loyal subjects, ready to testify all civil obedience, by the oath of allegiance, or otherwise, and that of conscience; who are persecuted (only for differing in religion) contrary to Divine and human testimonies.* He wrote:

Our miseries are long and lingering imprisonments for many years in divers counties of England, in which many have died and left behind them widows, and many small children; taking away our goods, and others the like, of which we can make a good probation; not for any disloyalty to your Majesty, nor hurt to any mortal man, our adversaries themselves being judges; but only because we dare not assent unto, and practice in the worship of God, such things as we have not faith in, because it is sin against the Most High.

The Baptist writer of this *Humble Supplication* was confined for his faith in Newgate, during which time he compiled his statement. Naturally, he was allowed no proper writing materials nor opportunities to pen his complaints, it being illegal to publish this sort of material. So how was it done? Williams explained the procedure. He said that the prisoner ‘wrote these arguments in milk, on sheets of paper brought by the woman, his keeper, from a friend in London, as the stopples of his milk bottle. On such paper, written with milk, nothing will appear; but the way of reading it by

fire being known to his friend who received the papers, he transcribed and kept together the papers, although the author himself could not correct nor view what (he) himself had written'. The problems confronting us – 'unfortunately my PC is rather slow with the latest software' – seem pretty small in comparison, do they not!

The *Supplication* fell on deaf ears, it goes without saying, and the persecution went on unabated. But in spite of the horrible punishments meted out to those whose only crime was to separate from the Church of England because they 'dare not assent unto, and practice in the worship of God, such things as we have not faith in', the authorities simply could not stamp out the Baptists; not for the want of trying, it must be said. Rather, they multiplied! Indeed, King James was 'much troubled and grieved at the heart, to hear every day of so much defection from [State] religion, both to Popery and Anabaptism, or other points of separation, in some parts of this kingdom'.

He knew who to blame and why. It was the poor, even useless, preaching of the Church of England ministers, 'the lightness... and unprofitableness of that kind of preaching', he said, which left the people in darkness. James complained that this ignorance paved the way for 'the manuals and catechisms of the popish priests, or the papers and pamphlets of the Anabaptists, Brownists, and Puritans'. But it was not only the weak Anglican preachers which encouraged the advance of the Separatists, particularly the Baptists. The pattern, the order and the life of the New Testament churches had been rediscovered. And a growing number of believers were willing to reform their lives and churches in order to obey Christ in his word, whatever the cost.

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Reader, has all this been a needless review of long-forgotten disputes? Surely not. The issues Smyth and Helwys raised are of abiding importance. They are relevant today. How are men made Christians? What is a church? How do you become a member? What of religious tolerance? These are not trivial matters. Godly men and women, four centuries ago, spent their best days and endeavours for these issues. Some languished in fever-ridden gaols for years. Some gave their lives. Some were left penniless widows or orphans. Assuredly, these stern facts speak volumes.

But leaving aside the issues themselves, are you not challenged by the way these saints were always thinking and reforming? They were always searching the Scriptures to discover God's mind. What a wonderful attitude. This is a rebuke to many of us today, is it not? They did not talk of visions and dreams – they knew that God speaks through his written word.

And how this made them search the Bible! And with what zeal and willingness they obeyed whatever the Holy Spirit taught them!

Again, think of their industry; not only Smyth, but so many of the Puritans and the Separatists – think how many books they wrote, what works they accomplished, what sermons they preached. When we remember that a great many of their years were spent in suffering, in prison, in being chased from one place to another, years spent in poverty and exile, it makes their exertions all the more remarkable. No wonder they grew old before their time. Many went to an early grave for ‘they did not love their lives to the death’ (Rev. 12:11). And yet they were always searching the Bible, always writing, always reforming the church. How dare we offer paltry excuses to explain away our laziness and laxity? Shame on us! Did Christ mean more to them than he does to us? Did they think more highly of the church than we do? I am afraid the answers are self-evident.

Remember, huge forces were lined up against them. The massive engines of war which their enemies employed were awesome. The monarchy, Parliament and the magistrate all used the foul weapons of imprisonment, torture and exile to try to stamp out the Baptists. They were ridiculed. They were gagged. Free debate was out of the question. The merest whiff of dissent was anathema to the powers that be. If Satan had got his way, the combination of State and Church with its muscle, both political and religious, would have crushed the Baptists at birth. He was well used to the tactic (Rev. 12:4). But David’s words came true again, for the battle was – and is – the LORD’S (1 Sam. 17:47). God enabled his people to overcome by faith. In fact, they were more than conquerors through him who loved them (Rom. 8:37).

It goes without saying that the early Baptists got some things wrong. But before we laugh at their mistakes, we must remind ourselves that they were engaged in a war. We must never forget that they were embroiled in a spiritual battle against Satan in order to get the church back to the New Testament. And mistakes are always made by men in war. Costly mistakes. Sad mistakes. Sinful mistakes. Even so, the biggest and worst mistake of all is to do nothing. If I remember rightly, during the Second World War, Winston Churchill promised to support any General of the British Army, and to live with his mistakes, as long as that General was taking the fight to the enemy. We may rest assured that the Lord Christ will never forsake his people, and those who do all they can to uphold his cause against Satan will have their reward. If we, today, make a compromise with the powers of darkness in order to save our skin, we shall have to answer for it. Let us be men. The hour calls for such. We are now engaged in this same war.

*Back to England*

How do we measure up to the likes of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys?  
Reader, what do you feel about yourself?

## *Heaven on Earth – Almost*

A beloved brother, a faithful minister

Colossians 4:7

*A retracing of steps – Amsterdam, 1608 – Robinson – exiled Scrooby church moves to Leyden – the reasons – Robinson's important views – his unique contribution – the prosperity of the church – their Lord's days – their spirituality – their poverty – the rise of Arminianism in Holland – contrasted with Calvinism – the Synod of Dort – decision to emigrate to the New World – the reasons – the steps – Robinson's final sermon – the farewell*

We must now return to where we left the history of the third church of English Separatists in Holland. As we have seen, the Scrooby church, with Richard Clyfton as its pastor and John Robinson its teacher, eventually reached Amsterdam in 1608. The members did not choose to settle in the city, but within a few months they were seeking permission from the authorities at Leyden, about twenty-two miles off, to move there. This was duly granted, and all arrangements were concluded by 1609. Leyden was 'a fair and beautiful city', but there were other, deeper, reasons for the Scrooby church to move there. No doubt, the quarrels which would be sure to come about with the domineering Francis Johnson, the pastor of the Ancient church, in addition to the notorious troubles already taking place within that church, made Leyden seem very attractive. Endless, miserable wrangles held no pleasure for men like John Robinson and William Bradford. However, not all the church members were agreed that they should leave Amsterdam. Richard Clyfton, for one, stayed behind, since his sympathies had begun to lie with Francis Johnson and a more Presbyterian form of church government with its emphasis upon eldership rule.

Having found a meeting-house in Leyden, the Scrooby church appointed Robinson to be their new pastor, and William Brewster as the ruling elder. They looked upon these ministerial appointments as the business of the church acting alone, claiming that the New Testament gives every church this warrant. Further, they believed that the authority of their ministers extended to that particular church only. Therefore, they did not call upon any outside body or person to appoint their ministers for them. They believed that each church, composed only of the regenerate, is entirely self-governing and ought to be completely free of outside interference from any other church. As I remarked in the previous chapter,

they held the same view on the gathered church as that expressed by the Baptist, Thomas Helwys. If only two or three are gathered in Christ's name to form a church, that body possesses all the powers of a true church, they said. It can and must organise itself according to the New Testament. It is answerable to Christ alone.

These ideas are very important. The Separatists were discovering more and more aspects of New Testament church order, things which we take for granted very often these days. But, sadly, not all Separatist churches continue to hold these principles – principles which cost our fathers dear. This point has come up before. Nowadays, denominational attitudes are developing, and they are doing so in the most unlikely of places. How few churches, today, appoint pastors entirely free of other churches, clear of all outside influence. Do many churches appoint pastors from within their own church, for example? While it cannot always be wrong to find a pastor from another church, what is the New Testament warrant for the way most churches appoint their pastors today? Too often it has more in common with the transfer market of professional football clubs than with Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Bible colleges and seminaries can act like clearing-houses for ministers and churches when pastoral appointments are being considered.

Although Smyth and Robinson went their separate ways in 1609, Smyth's influence over Robinson, which dated from their time together in England, continued to affect his friend for good. And the pair of them, in their different ways, made massive contributions to the cause of reform in the church. Smyth's we have looked at; now for Robinson's.

Robinson's position is virtually unique among the early Separatists; indeed, he is an outstanding individual in the entire history of the church. Certainly he was of a very different character to men like Francis Johnson and Robert Browne, men who brought discredit upon the effort to get back to the New Testament order because of their quarrelsome churches and ways. John Smyth, in his turn, teetered on the edge of instability. These men were great and good, but they found it very hard to handle the practical aspects of reform. Apart from coming to the proper biblical understanding on baptism, it was John Robinson who demonstrated that the New Testament pattern of independent churches is not just an ideal; it works. Not only is it right from a theoretical point of view; it is practicable. Jumping ahead of ourselves to Robinson's adoption of Independency – of which see later – it has been well said of him:

No name in the history of Independency shines with greater lustre than his. To him the churches of that communion were indebted, until the time of [John]

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<sup>1</sup> I am, of course, speaking of what I know in the UK. Is there anything similar in, say, US professional baseball?

Owen, for the ablest vindication of their principles, as against the Church of England on the one hand, and the Baptists on the other. He was a man of profound scholarship, high culture, and of a largeness of heart which was, at that time, less common among the Separatists than many other qualities. As a theological disputant he was quick and vigorous. None of the Separatists lacked moral courage, but Robinson had a higher courage than most, if not any, of his brethren.

Many early Separatists were mighty men, but most of them found the transition from the State Church to local independent church life very difficult to cope with in the day-to-day sense. The scriptural arguments they handled magnificently, but it was the practical implementation of their reasoning which proved very hard for them to come to terms with. This should cause us little surprise, for it was a huge leap which they took. It must be remembered that when the first Separatists were trying to recover the New Testament order in the 1580s, only sixty years had passed since Luther nailed his theses to the door at Wittenberg. Even when Smyth and Robinson arrived in Holland, only ninety years had gone by. So very much had happened in a remarkably short time. Short? Yes, in less than a century a great many of the corruptions which had smothered the church during the previous twelve or fourteen hundred years of apostasy had been pushed aside. Reader, think of that – in less than a century! And, remember, communication and travel were very limited and much more difficult in those days. Why, they were almost non-existent; most people never moved away from the village in which they were born, and had no contact with the outside world. There was no telephone, fax or e-mail to enable them to consult others or spread the good news of church reformation.<sup>2</sup> The staggering rapidity of the changes under adverse conditions must be borne in mind when assessing the characters involved, or when criticising their mistakes.

It is not too far from the truth to say that ‘the most conspicuous fault of the Separatists was excessive dogmatism. It was impossible for any of them to err; impossible for any who differed from them to hold the truth. They were all infallible in their judgements, and none but they knew the whole counsel of God’. Yes, many of them gave that impression, perhaps. But it is too easy to criticise from the comfort of our vantage point, and the target they present is very big. Being an armchair general is a very pleasant pastime for some. It is very sad but quite understandable that the Separatists sometimes fell short of the highest standard, and I say that without excusing the wrong. They were engaged in a mortal spiritual battle; they had no time or taste for the niceties of leisurely debate, debate conducted according to the dictates of the schools, though it is true that

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<sup>2</sup> How rapidly things have moved since 1997 (the first edition)!

some like Smyth were transfixed by their training in logic. And, of course, the numerous changes in their churches were coming at a tremendous pace, which in itself made for difficulties.

Thus it fell to John Robinson in particular – he being ‘of a finer mould and higher temper’ than the others – to realise more than most just what was involved in the shortness of the time-scale and the rapidity of the changes. God greatly used him to put into practical effect New Testament principles; that is where he made his important contribution. It is not too much to say that the survival of the rediscovery of New Testament church life in the beginning of the 17th century owed an immense amount to him. It still does. His wise and gracious application of biblical teaching probably rescued Separatism from absolute ruin. Even Robinson’s enemies in the State Church admitted that he was ‘the most learned, polished and modest spirit that ever separated from the Church of England’. Of him it was said that he was:

A man learned, and of solid judgement, and of a quick, sharp wit... of a tender conscience and very sincere in all his ways, a hater of hypocrisy and dissimulation, and would be very plain with his best friends. He was very courteous, affable and sociable in his conversation... He was an acute and expert disputant, very quick and ready, and had much bickering with the Arminians, who stood more in fear of him than of any in the University. He was never satisfied with himself till he had searched any cause or argument... thoroughly and to the bottom... and was ever desirous of any light... He was very profitable in his ministry... to [the] people. He was much beloved of them, and as loving was he unto them, and entirely sought their good for soul and body. In a word, he was much esteemed... of all that knew him.

But it must not be thought that Robinson was as pliable as an old shoe, or that he never disputed vigorously with those in error. A hint of his skill appears in the words just quoted. Nor was Robinson afraid to carry out church discipline. He did not seek to keep high numbers at the expense of spirituality. Nor was he satisfied that the reform of the church was complete, but he was always eager for more scriptural understanding. As just indicated, he did not shy away from controversy, and those with whom he debated found ‘he could strike with equal swiftness, and generally with surer accuracy than most of his rivals’. Of course, he was not perfect. In one area of debate especially, he – in common with a great many – fell short.<sup>3</sup> ‘He was unworthy of himself in his controversy with the Baptists, but who had been worthy of himself in that dispute?’ Even so, taking all in all, ‘no other man possessed his spirit’.

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<sup>3</sup> See my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

The Scrooby church, having moved to Leyden, rapidly grew in numbers – probably to well over two hundred members. They also grew in grace. Enjoying unbroken peace and spiritual delight, they made sure that they quickly and sweetly dealt with inevitable differences and difficulties as they arose within the church. Nor were they slack; if any members who were under discipline did not respond then ‘the church purged of those that were incurable and incorrigible, when, after much patience used, no other means would serve’. But the strictness of the church did not put all would-be members off, and many others joined them from England where James and his bishops were bent on ‘harrying them out of the land, or worse’. No doubt, these exiles were greatly attracted by the life of the Congregational church, its spiritual fellowship, its loving but firm discipline, and the powerful preaching of its faithful minister.

Robinson continued to stress the voluntary nature of church life, the necessary willingness of the people to appoint and support their pastor, and the mutual regard which all must have for each other. This was not a technical point of mere theory, but one with real practical benefit. Enlarging upon the great obligation which this imposes upon all of them within the church, he observed:

It much furthers the love of the people to the person of their minister, and so, consequently, their obedience unto his doctrine and government... It leaves them without excuse, if they either perfidiously forsake or unprofitably use such a man’s holy service and ministration.

The Leyden church was without doubt a church where the members did value their minister, did receive his teaching, heeded his reproof, submitted to his correction and learned by his instruction. He, for his part, did not ‘strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers’. On the contrary, he was a minister who did ‘not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth’ (2 Tim. 2:14-15). He exemplified the scriptural requirements of a minister, namely, ‘in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you’ (Tit. 2:7-8). Robinson was certainly correct when he said that those who forsake such a church, and such a minister, ‘perfidiously’ – that is, treacherously, breaking faith, lacking loyalty – it undeniably ‘leaves them without excuse’. These words need to be pondered today by those who are quite willing to up-roots, walk away from a church, or change a minister on the flimsiest of pretexts.

What was the Lord’s day like in Leyden? How did the saints spend its precious hours? Though they were desperately busy in the week, lawfully striving to earn a necessary crust, they did not lie in bed on Sundays. They

might be ‘pinched’ in their circumstances, having to take up ‘such trades and employments as they best could... with hard and continual labour’, but the Lord’s day was the best of all days to them. The church would meet at eight for the morning service. They would assemble again at two in the afternoon for another. What kind of services did they hold? What did they do? They said:

We begin with prayer; afterwards we read one or two chapters of the Bible, give the sense thereof and discuss it. The first speaker then announces a text and preaches on it for about an hour. Then the second speaker talks on the same text for the same length of time and after him the third, fourth and maybe the fifth.

What would they think of our church services? It would seem that some things which are often a feature of present-day meetings were unknown to the early Separatists; or unwanted by them. What would they think of our Lord’s days? Reader, what do you think of theirs? What have we lost? Bradford’s opinion was that ‘such was the true piety, the humble zeal and fervent love of this people towards God and his ways, and the single-heartedness and sincere affection one towards another, that they came as near the primitive pattern of the first churches as any other church of these later times have done’.

Like Smyth, Robinson replied to the criticism levelled against Separatism by their former friend and sympathiser, Richard Bernard. It will be recalled that Bernard attacked the principle of self-governing churches, and did so with undisguised contempt. But Robinson not only had the Scriptures on his side, he possessed another advantage over the Anglican in that he, Robinson, was a member of a Separatist church, with first-hand experience of its benefits. Robinson made excellent use of his knowledge and experience. It was not a nice point of debate for him but he could write as one who had tasted for himself. He said:

I tell you that if ever I saw the beauty of Zion and the glory of the Lord filling his tabernacle, it has been in the manifestation of the divers graces of God in the church, in that heavenly harmony and comely order wherein by the grace of God we are set and walk, wherein if your eyes had but seen the brethren’s sober and modest carriage one towards another, their humble and willing submission unto their guides in the Lord, their tender compassion towards the weak, their fervent zeal against scandalous offenders and their longsuffering towards all, you would, I am persuaded, change your mind, and be compelled, like Balaam, to... bless where you proposed to curse.

Miles Standish and Edward Winslow – names to come down the centuries – figured among the many who were attracted to the church. Indeed, they were charmed with it. Winslow, years later, could look back with fond

memories to say: ‘I persuade myself never people upon earth lived more lovingly together... more sweetly than we the church at Leyden did’. Bradford recorded that their days were spent in ‘much sweet and delightful society and spiritual comfort together, in the ways of God, under the able ministry and prudent government of Mr John Robinson and Mr William Brewster... so as they grew in knowledge and other gifts and graces of the Spirit of God; and lived together in peace, and love, and holiness’.

The Dutch also held them in high esteem, and the magistrates were able to record that they never had any lawsuit or accusation which involved the English church, whereas strifes and quarrels were constant among the French exiles. In addition, the local bankers and traders found the church members entirely trustworthy, men and women who were as good as their word. Those who were in a position to know testified that they were a hardworking and diligent people. However, their enemies in England tried to stir up the Dutch – both in Amsterdam and Leyden – against them, but to no avail. The local people knew better!

Was this church not a very close approximation to the pattern of the New Testament? What a high level of spiritual life they experienced together. They valued the preaching of their faithful minister, but that was not the only aspect of their common life which was so honouring to God. They enjoyed a fellowship which was spiritual and not merely social. They watched over each other in love. They disciplined themselves under God’s word in order to produce personal holiness. Indeed the whole emphasis of their church life was spiritual. How very different things are today in many churches, where carnal, worldly entertainment is the norm. How the word ‘fellowship’ is debased. Take away the social, fleshly activities in many contemporary churches, and what would be left? Precious little. We must get back to the New Testament pattern. Have we not had more than enough of shoddy alternatives? ‘How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold!’ (Lam. 4:1).

Let us pursue this thought a little further. As I said in the Introduction, our religion, our church life, must be God-centred, not man-centred. This would seem an obvious statement to make but, alas, it needs to be made, and made very strongly today. We need to be reminded that one great difference between a Christian and all other men is that the Christian lives not for himself, but for Christ. ‘He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again’ (2 Cor. 5:15). The believer puts Christ and the gospel first (Matt. 10:34-39; Mark 8:34-38; 10:29; Luke 9:23-26); he ‘no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God’ (1 Pet. 4:2). Our pagan days gave us more than enough of carnality, did they not (1 Pet. 4:3)? We ought now to live for God, not ourselves. Indeed

we should *want* to live for God. Christians are those who ‘desire to live godly in Christ Jesus’ (2 Tim. 3:12).

What is more, surely this living for Christ with an eye to doing the will of God and not living for ourselves will be reflected in our church life, will it not? If our personal, private and family life is spent in godliness, a godliness which brings us much delight, how is it possible that we could ever be satisfied with a church life which is worldly? What! A spiritual life at home, but a carnal life in the church! The very suggestion is unthinkable, or ought to be. Yet in these days, grievously, there *is* much carnality in the churches and in the homes of some professing Christians. However, since this book is about the church, I deliberately refrain from developing the latter point. But, of course, our life is all of a piece, it is all one. What we are at home, what we are in the church – what we are in private, what we are in public – that is what we are. The question is: Are we godly, or are we not?

I wonder whether present-day pagans, if they knew exactly what was going on in many churches, would be forced to ‘think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation’ (1 Pet. 4:4)? The answer is, No! I fear that too often they would find abundant evidence of pagan, carnal activities within the life of the church. They would recognise what they see. There would be nothing ‘strange’. They would feel quite at home with what goes on. Why? Because the church is aping the world. Yet the pagans of the first century *did* find the godliness of the early Christians ‘strange’. That is what Peter said. The church and the world were very different to each other in those days. I go as far as to suggest that the roles have been largely reversed in this present age. A good many contemporary, so-called Christians would find the life of the early church ‘strange’, but worldly ways are quite familiar to them! I go further. They find a church where the life is scriptural not only strange – it is abhorrent to them.

The chief mark of the ‘perilous times’, times which have come and which will continue to come upon the church during this gospel age, is that ‘men will be lovers of themselves’. This self-love shows itself in all sorts of ways, culminating in men being ‘lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God’ (2 Tim. 3:1-5). Reader, observe that these words do not refer to pagan society. Pagans always love pleasure; they do not love God at all. The words refer to the church, the professing people of God. There are times, seasons, when supposed Christians love pleasure more than God. They profess to love God, but they love pleasure to a greater degree than their love for the Lord. What is more, they have ‘a form of godliness’ but they deny its power. They are professing Christians, but it is in name only. Hence the perilous times do not refer to the behaviour of pagans, but to that of churches or professing Christians. In times like these, churches,

church members, become man-centred instead of being God-centred. Among other things, they engage in carnal activities and worldly entertainments because they prefer those activities to the worship of God. Their concern is to please themselves, not to please the Lord. Yet they continue to ladle a sauce of religious talk over their worldliness – very much as Micah, the Levite and the Danites did in Judges 17 and 18. They, it will be recalled, talked about ‘the LORD’, his guidance and blessing while they were breaking the ten commandments wholesale. The same is repeated during the perilous times. It is happening today. Peter warned us of it (2 Pet. 2:10,13,20-22). Men say they are worshipping God, but they are bowing down at the shrine of pleasure. Nevertheless God reads our hearts, not merely our lips (Matt. 15:7-9; 1 Sam. 16:7). He is not interested in our mere words and professions. It is generally accepted that actions have a more telling voice than words.

Furthermore, it is not only what we do, but *why* we do it that concerns God. Our methods are important, but so are our motives. Do we engage in our church activity for ourselves or for God? We pray for God’s blessing on our church life; but what is the motive? Is it that we may spend it on our pleasures (Jas. 4:3)? Listen to the searching question God asked his people through the prophet: ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for me – for me? When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?’ (Zech. 7:5-6). Oh yes! ‘For yourselves’! We have been warned of apostasy in the churches, of that time to ‘come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers’ (2 Tim. 4:3), teachers who will satisfy their carnal demands. There it is again, the same principle! Religion and church life – in this case teaching – arranged ‘according to their own desires’, to suit the whims of men. It matters not to them that the doctrine or the practice of the church might be false, that it might be offensive to God, that it might be contrary to his word. Oh no! Why not? Because ‘my people love to have it so’ (Jer. 5:31). It gives them pleasure – and that is what they want. They love it. Their great aim is to please themselves. Yet God continues to demand that his people live for him, and only for him (1 John 2:15-17).

We live in perilous times today. These very things are taking place in many contemporary churches. Demas (2 Tim. 4:10) has fathered countless children and founded numerous churches which have forsaken the apostles and gone after the world because of their love of it. We must return to the biblical position. Our church life, worship, preaching, fellowship, the Lord’s supper, prayer meetings and discipline must be carried out with a single eye to God’s glory. ‘Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God’ (1

Cor. 10:31). Surely this great principle must be applied to the affairs of the church. If not there, where?<sup>4</sup>

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To return to the church at Leyden. On their arrival in Holland, the exiles were penniless; consequently they took up any trade or manual work which they could find to support themselves. They had given up much by way of earthly comforts in order to have liberty of worship, but they did not complain of their temporal losses; they valued the prosperity of their souls above all else, counting ‘peace and their spiritual comfort above any riches whatsoever’. They knew they had ‘chosen that good part’ (Luke 10:42).

To support himself and his family, Brewster gave English lessons to Dutch and German gentlemen, and later in partnership with another he opened a printing shop. This enabled them to publish works which were prohibited in England. Bradford, among others, worked in the fustian trade, while the rest took up various forms of manual labour, even though this work was particularly hard for them since they had come from an agricultural background in rural England. Their daily lives were thus afflicted with much suffering, and it made them old before their time. As physical weakness overtook them, so a pitiless poverty ground them down. A generation like ours, reared on the Welfare State, need to be reminded that there was no Social Security, no old-age pension, no National Health Service in those days. There was no ‘fall back’ position. It was all or nothing; with them it was all. Obedience to Christ cost them dear. It cost them everything; home, country, job, ease, reputation and eventually life itself. Truly they lived up to Christ’s demands (Matt. 10:34-39; Mark 8:34-38; 10:29; Luke 9:23-26). They, like so many others I have written about, thought ‘brown bread and the gospel was good fare’. Today most of us demand our earthly comforts along with spiritual blessings. But which is the more important? Which would we give up first? Reader, what is your priority?

Robinson, like very many Separatists, was a prolific writer. He produced sixty-two essays on topics of a non-controversial kind, in addition to many other books. As hinted earlier, he also played a full part in the Arminian controversy which was raging throughout Holland and the rest of Europe at the time. I have referred to the rise of Arminianism and its clash with Calvinism several times already. This is the place to look at that important dispute.

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<sup>4</sup> See the extended note, ‘Inclusivism’, in my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

Arminius died in 1609, and in 1610 his followers published their Remonstrance – a statement against the orthodox Calvinist position. In 1611, the Calvinists replied with a Counter-Remonstrance, and a vigorous series of debates ensued. Robinson figured prominently in this conflict; indeed, he was chosen to engage in public disputation with Episcopus, the champion of the Arminians. Having attended the lectures of the rival teachers in the University of Leyden, Robinson fully mastered the arguments involved. And when he stood up to face his opponent:

The Lord did so help him to defend the truth and foil his adversary, as he put him to an apparent nonplus in this great and public audience. And the like he did two or three times upon such like occasions; the which, as it has caused many to praise God that the truth had so famous a victory, so it procured him much honour and respect from those learned men, and others which loved the truth.

Robinson richly deserved his reputation as a thorough student of Scripture, and a very able disputant. He fully met the apostle's requirements of an elder, namely, 'holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict' (Tit. 1:9). He had made himself so well-acquainted with the arguments of the free-willers that 'none was fitter to buckle with them... so as he began to be terrible to the Arminians'.

The great controversy was finally decided by the calling of a synod, convened in the Dutch town of Dordrecht, or Dort, in 1618-19. The outcome of this now-famous synod was the production of the orthodox statement of Calvinistic doctrine known as the Canons of Dort. This document entered or influenced the standard Confessions of many Reformed churches.

### *A look at Arminianism*

Arminius was a Dutch theologian, born in 1560, and educated at Leyden and Geneva; he was even taught by Beza, Calvin's successor. He became a minister in a Reformed congregation in Amsterdam in 1588. After beginning to question the orthodox Calvinistic faith, he gave up his pastoral position to become professor of theology in the University of Leyden. Here his lectures on predestination soon brought him into open dispute with the Calvinists. As just noted, after his death in 1609, his followers published the principles of their system in the Remonstrance of 1610. This met with a reply, the Counter-Remonstrance, in 1611. Politics as usual – even inevitable under the Constantine system – became enmeshed in the quarrel, but in 1618-1619 the Synod of Dort was convened to deal with the great issues involved.

Since whole books have been written on the Synod itself, and virtual libraries produced on the various issues involved, it goes without saying that this present glance will be very superficial, to say the least. I leave aside the question of State and Church which was also involved in the deliberations at Dort, simply to look at the doctrine of salvation.

The Arminians had deviated from the historic faith. Since they were arguing from a different premise, inevitably they produced different conclusions to those of the old Calvinistic system. The great question in 1618 was, and still is: What is the biblical system of salvation? Dort was not taken up with mere slogans; it was the biblical doctrine of salvation which was at stake. The Synod was called to deal with the Arminians' statement on salvation. What novelties did the Arminians put forward? Actually many of their views were not as novel as all that – they stemmed from the heresies of Pelagius twelve hundred years before.

They argued from a philosophical viewpoint that if God is truly sovereign, man cannot be free. The two statements are directly contradictory, they said. Therefore if God is sovereign, man cannot be responsible. One of the statements must be sacrificed. Further, they argued, God does not demand of man what man is unable to give. What God requires, man must be able to do. In other words, they argued, human responsibility and human ability run hand-in-hand; they have the same limits. What God says man *must* do, man *can* do, otherwise God would not demand it of him. In particular, the Arminians further argued that since faith is an act of man, and since man has a responsibility to believe, it follows therefore that he must have the ability to believe. He must be able to believe, otherwise God could not – would not – demand it of him. Since faith is an obligation for all men, all men therefore must have the ability to believe.

Logic rules the roost. Logic demands a consistency which will satisfy human reason; it abhors loose ends and unresolved paradoxes or antinomies. All must be cut and dried.<sup>5</sup>

To summarise the Arminian position: The Remonstrance was a philosophical disputation concerning God's sovereignty and human responsibility. To this great question the Arminians applied their minds, and by using the arguments of reason and logic they produced five propositions. They said:

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<sup>5</sup> It is only fair to point out that hyper-Calvinism is precisely the same as Arminianism on this point. Logic, logic consistent with human reason, is king. Every text must be forced into the mould, or have its corners pared away, to make it fit into the pre-determined system.

1. It is agreed that man is fallen; nevertheless he still has some spiritual power or ability. He, by his own power, can savingly believe the gospel.
2. It is agreed that God has elected some to salvation. He has elected those whom he has foreseen will respond to the gospel. Indeed, he has elected them on the grounds of their faith which he has foreseen. Because God sees that they will believe, he is pleased to call them his elect.
3. It is agreed that Christ died for sinners. He died for all sinners. Not that his death secured the salvation of any man but, rather, it made salvation possible for all.
4. It is agreed that God calls men in the gospel, but sinners have power to resist God in this call. They have sufficient power to make God's call ineffective.
5. Once a man has responded to the gospel and believed, he may even yet lose his salvation, fall away and be lost for ever.

This, in brief, is an outline of the Arminian Remonstrance, produced in 1610. The Counter-Remonstrance, a year later, restated the old orthodox Calvinistic system, which is the gospel. Unfortunately, since the Remonstrance came first, the impression is given that Calvinism is the 'new-boy'. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Counter-Remonstrance was a reiteration of the old doctrine; it was Arminianism which was the novelty, apart from the proviso concerning Pelagius. Again, by the historical quirk of Dort, it seems as though Calvinism is only negative; it looks as though it is nothing more than an anti-Arminian statement. This is a travesty. Calvinism existed in its own right; it did not need the error of an Arminius for it to be put forward. It is the gospel! It existed before Arminius was born or ever Calvin taught it! To adapt Cartwright's words to Whitgift, it thrived about sixteen centuries before Dort when it received its clearest declaration in the writings of Paul.

The Calvinists replied to the Remonstrance in five principles of their own. They were:

1. Man is by nature totally depraved by the Fall in Adam. This does not mean that he is as bad as he might be, but he is in every part corrupted and totally unable to perform any spiritual good. He is by nature under the wrath of God. (See Ps. 51:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10-18; Eph. 2:1-5 etc.).
2. God the Father has unconditionally elected those who are to be saved. God's election is totally free and is not qualified by any outside influence. In particular, it is not based on any foreknowledge of faith in man, nor on the basis of any supposed merit in him. It is based on God's free and sovereign grace. God has freely chosen to salvation those whom he willed

to save. (See John 15:16; Rom. 8:28-30; 9:14-24; 1 Cor. 1:26-29; Eph. 1:4,11; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; Tit. 3:4-7 etc.).

3. God the Son freely suffered and died to accomplish fully the salvation of all the elect. Christ did not die to make salvation merely possible, nor merely show the way of salvation, but he died to save actually and completely all the elect. Christ died particularly and only for the elect. The atonement is limited in its extent to them. (See Matt. 1:21; John 10:14-15; 17:2-4,9-10,20; Eph. 5:25; 2 Tim. 1:9-10 etc.).

4. God the Holy Spirit effectually calls the elect out of sin into the state of salvation. He irresistibly works in the elect, applying to them the fruits of Christ's redemption, giving them all necessary grace to bring them to Christ for salvation. This includes faith and repentance. (See John 6:37-39,44; Rom. 8:28-30, 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:4-7 etc.).

5. All the saints of God – that is all those who have been elected, redeemed and called to saving faith in Christ – shall be brought to glory. The saints of God shall certainly continue in faith and holiness, they shall persevere to the end, through God's sanctifying grace. (See John 10:25-30; Rom. 8:30; Phil. 1:5-6 etc.).

These Five Points of Calvinism, as they have been long called, can be remembered by the simple word **TULIP** – Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints. While this is very much over-simplified – simplistic, indeed, as if the gospel system could be contained in a mere five points! – it is a handy mnemonic. But this over-simplification is not the only fault with **TULIP**. Calvinism stands as an entire or whole system; it does not consist of a mere five isolated doctrines. The five principles hang or fall together. They all proceed from one source which is the sovereignty of God in salvation (Jonah 2:9). They all lead to the one end – which is the glory of God:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and his ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become his counsellor? Or who has first given to him and it shall be repaid to him?’ For of him and through him and to him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).<sup>6</sup>

The many differences between Arminianism and Calvinism cannot be exaggerated. At a superficial glance, it may not appear to be the case, since both systems use the same words – sin, election, redemption, and so on.

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<sup>6</sup> For more on this, see both my *The Gospel Offer is Free* and *Particular Redemption and The Free Offer*.

But these words mean entirely different things to an Arminian and a Calvinist. I use the present tense since the controversy remains with us. While the Synod of Dort effectively slaughtered the Arminian heresy, alas, it has been a long time dying.

1. Arminians and Calvinists each believe in election, but they do not mean the same thing by it. Arminians agree that believers are elect, but they say God elected them because they believed in Christ. In contrast, Calvinists declare that believers come to believe in Christ because they were elected. It was God's election which brought them to faith, not their faith which made God elect them. The Arminian looks upon God's election as the *effect* of the believer's faith; the Calvinist knows that God's election is the *cause* of the believer's faith. One sees faith as producing election; the other sees election as producing faith. The Arminian statement is shoddy – how can it be called an election? God, according to them, elects all who choose to believe. Hardly *God's choice*, is it!

2. Arminians and Calvinists each believe in conversion, but they do not mean the same thing by it. Arminians speak of 'deciding for Christ', a kind of mental assent or decision little different to the making of any other sort of choice in life. In contrast, Calvinists say that God regenerates sinners, effectually calling them, thus enabling them to believe. Arminians think that God helps men to save themselves; indeed, that God needs men's help to save them. Calvinists assert that God saves sinners. And they put a stress upon all three words. *God* saves sinners. *God saves* sinners. *God saves sinners*.

3. Arminians and Calvinists each believe in limited atonement, but they define both the limit and the atonement in very different ways. Arminians stoutly deny that they limit the atonement, but they do – and in a totally unscriptural way. Christ died for all sinners, according to them, but his death secured salvation for no one. Their concept of redemption is that it is universal in its extent, but utterly without guarantee in its effect. It is certain to save nobody. And even those who do believe might still lose their salvation. These are grievous, appalling limits put upon the eternal purpose which God accomplished in Christ's redemption (Eph. 3:11). Arminians do not believe that God really accomplished anything through the cross of Christ. Reader, whether or not Arminians like it said, they do impose a very severe limit on Christ's redemptive work. They robustly deny it, and protest that they hold to an unlimited atonement. It is not so.

In contrast to this hedging by the Arminians, Calvinists also limit the atonement – and they openly say so – but they limit it in its extent, not in its power. All for whom Christ died shall be saved. Arminians hold that Christ made salvation possible but not certain for any, while Calvinists

know that Christ died for the elect and that all the elect will be saved. Far more than numbers is at stake in this question of a limited atonement. It is the *nature* of the atonement, and not merely its *extent*, which is at the heart of the dispute.

4. Arminians and Calvinists each believe in preaching the gospel, but they define both the preaching and the gospel in very different ways. Arminians think that sinners have power within themselves to believe, and they must be persuaded to believe by the application of all sorts of techniques. They address sinners with carnal appeals to help God out. They allege that he wants to save them, but he is utterly helpless to do anything about it. Utterly opposed to that, Calvinists believe that by the preaching of the gospel God effectively calls sinners, working in them by his Holy Spirit, drawing them to Christ.

Consistent Calvinists never tell unbelievers that Christ died particularly for them. It is impossible to say anything of the kind, since no man knows who the elect are beforehand. In any case, to be saved, no sinner has to believe that Christ died particularly for him – that is not the gospel way of salvation. That is not what has to be preached. It is not: Believe that Christ died for you and you will be saved. It is: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31). There is a vast difference between the two. In truth, it is only after a sinner has trusted Christ that he can know that he is elect and that Christ died particularly for him (Gal. 2:20). It is only after a sinner has been brought to faith that the Holy Spirit grants this assurance (Eph. 1:13-14). The Spirit has not come to convince a sinner that Christ died particularly for him; rather, the Spirit's first work is to convince the sinner that he is a sinner because he does not believe in Christ (John 16:8-9).

What is more, it is not only the number of sinners to be saved which is involved in the limit to the atonement; the nature of saving faith is tied up with it as well. The way the preacher addresses sinners is affected by this discussion. The Arminian calls upon sinners to believe, but this can degenerate into the need to believe or accept a statement about the death of Christ. On the other hand, the Calvinist's – that is, the gospel's – call to sinners is to believe Christ, to trust him to save them, to rely upon his death and nothing else. They must rest their souls on Christ, not merely accept a statement about Christ. These calls are very different! Sinners need to cast themselves on the mercy of Christ at once and out of a sense of desperation, not calmly assent to a credal statement about Christ.

One strange deviant of modern-day Arminianism lies in its departure from the fifth point of the Remonstrance. Over the years, Arminians have invented another doctrine to replace the original article which stated that

the redeemed can fall away. Many Arminians now hold to a teaching they call ‘eternal security’; they have a slogan for it, ‘once saved, always saved’. This is not only contradictory to the rest of their system – and destructive of the consistent logic they so desperately strive to maintain – it is still totally unscriptural. And, as a consequence, it is highly dangerous, and it is the cause of much delusion among evangelicals. It is not true to say, ‘once saved, always saved’, in the sense intended. The biblical doctrine is that the elect, having been brought to faith and repentance, and made saints, will persevere in godliness, they will continue in holiness to the very end. Indeed, this is the great confirming mark of their election. The fact that a saint perseveres in holiness proves he is elect, redeemed and called. Without perseverance in holiness, men are not saints, they are not elect, they are not saved (Matt. 10:22; 24:13; John 8:31-32; 17:1-19; Eph. 5:1-7,25-27; Col. 1:21-23; 1 Thess. 1:2-10; 4:3; Heb. 3:14; 12:14 *etc.*).

Arminians have invented their new, pleasant doctrine to get round the horrible thought that they might fall away and be lost. The effect is tragic. It will produce generations of carnal men and women who, without a grain of godliness or spiritual life about them, possess enough confidence to rebut all reproofs and gospel invitations by repeating the slogan, ‘once saved, always saved’. It is already wreaking havoc. Having signed a decision card, gone forward at a meeting, been counselled, or been baptised years before, or whatever, many are convinced they are right with God, even though there is not a vestige of spirituality in their lives. What a devilish masterpiece!

Reader, if you belong to this group, please listen to my words. If you are not regenerate, your condition is desperate enough. You must be born again (John 3:3-7). But what makes your case even worse is that you are in the grip of a delusion that all is well with your soul. It is not. You are held in this fantasy by the modern Arminian teaching I have just written about. I warn you, you are on the broad road to destruction. Hell is gaping. The idea that you will be saved because you have signed a decision card, been counselled, or had some similar experience years ago, is so foolish, so pitiful... it is so far removed from scriptural reality, words literally fail. Come to Christ now. Cast yourself upon him now in faith. Turn from your wicked ways, calling upon the name of the Lord and you will be saved. You do not need a decision card – you need Christ. You do not need to be counselled – you need Christ. ‘Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon’ (Isa. 55:6-7).

If you, reader, are a preacher and you preach Arminianism, I hope I have said something to make you think again, at the very least.

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While the Arminian controversy was raging in Holland, the Congregational church in Leyden continued to think about its own church life. It began to explore the possibility of emigration to the New World because life in Holland was becoming anxious for them on several counts. They were very displeased with the low moral standards of the people around them; they were saddened by the slack observance of the Lord's day among the Dutch; they feared that their children would be led astray through the temptations of an immoral and extravagant society; there was a risk that war with Spain might break out at any time and then the church would be grievously scattered; intermarriage with the Dutch was likely and would eventually cause them to lose their English identity; their numbers were diminishing, partly because fewer exiles were coming to Holland as more Separatist churches were springing up in England, under the slightly easier conditions then in place; their children chafed at the hard life, so that some were going to sea or enlisting in the army, with all the temptations those occupations involved; King James was trying to make life difficult for them, even though they were exiles; and their meagre funds were coming to an end. But there was one reason above all others which made them think of going overseas. They felt a great longing to propagate the gospel in the remote parts of the world. Not that they had inflated views of their own importance in this great venture. Certainly not! They were willing to be counted as nothing if only they could make a start and 'though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so great a work', as they quaintly expressed themselves.

After much discussion and prayer, they decided that it was right to emigrate. Weighing the various options open to them, they entered negotiations with the appropriate bodies and petitioned the king. They held days of fasting and humiliation, during which they found John Robinson's sermons 'strengthening them against their fears and encouraging them in their resolutions'. They decided to divide into two groups on the basis of volunteers – the younger and stronger to go first to prepare the way for the others. Robinson himself would travel with the larger portion whichever it might be. In the end, it turned out that this was the part of the church which stayed in Leyden. To a measure, Robinson was disappointed, for 'he was full of devout fire in himself... he intended to go in person, and his whole heart was bound up in the undertaking'. Nevertheless, the venture was seen through to the end, though Robinson never did reach the New World. 'And

every step which he and his beloved fellow-disciples of Christ adopted in it was taken with prayer. If ever a church sought God's guidance, they did'.

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On Friday, the 21st of July, 1620, the members of the church which had left Scrooby some twelve or so years before, met for their last day together upon earth. The preacher was their pastor, John Robinson. He gave out his text, Ezra 8:21-22, thus:

Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying: 'The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all those that forsake him'.

John Robinson then lifted up his voice and preached to the whole church for the last time. As he drew to a close, he said:

We are now ere long to part asunder, and the Lord knows whether ever we shall live to see one another's faces. But whether the Lord has appointed it or not, I charge you before God and his blessed angels, follow me no further than I follow Christ; and if God shall reveal anything to you by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry. For I am confident the Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy word. I bewail the state and condition of the Reformed churches, who have come to a full-stop in religion, and will go no further than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn beyond what Luther saw; the Calvinists, they stick where Calvin left them. This is a misery much to be lamented; for though they were shining lights in their times, yet God did not reveal his whole will unto them, and if they were alive today they would be as ready to and willing to embrace further light, as that they had received. Keep in mind our church covenant, our promise and covenant with God and one another, to receive whatsoever light or truth shall be made known to us from his written word. But take heed what you receive for truth – examine it well and compare it and weigh it with other Scriptures of truth before you receive it. It is not possible that the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick anti-Christian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.

This farewell sermon of John Robinson has resonated down the centuries. Its stirring appeal has affected many for good. He called upon the people to search the Scriptures, to follow all the light which God grants in his word, and not to follow men, even great men, even men which have been much used of God. It is most remarkable that Robinson emphasised this particular point in his final sermon to the departing saints. It is most likely

that he had in mind especially the matter of church government and order, for by this time Robinson was no longer truly a Separatist in the sense of a being a Congregationalist. He had once been a conforming Puritan, he had become a Separatist, now he had moved again and had become an Independent through the influence of one Henry Jacob. I will have more to say on this in the chapter which follows.

Robinson urged the church members to do everything within their power to keep in union with all other Christians, maintaining fellowship with them, short of sin and compromise of the truth. And he encouraged them not to be slow to take another pastor or teacher, ‘for that flock that has two shepherds is not endangered, but secured by it’, he said.

After the preaching service, they adjourned to Robinson’s house where Christians from other churches joined them in a feast. After the meal, though they shed many tears at the thought of their near parting, they encouraged themselves by the singing of psalms, in which they made ‘the sweetest melody’. Robinson finally brought the momentous day to a close with solemn prayer.

On the Saturday, many gathered on the quay at Delft Haven where the *Speedwell* – ‘a small vessel of about sixty tons’ – awaited them. There were many sighs, subdued sobs and snatched last words as the thirty who were to sail prepared to go aboard. ‘Truly doleful was the sight of that sad and mournful parting: to see what sighs and sobs and prayers did sound among them, what tears did gush from every eye, and pithy speeches pierced each heart; that sundry of the Dutch strangers that stood on the quay as spectators could not refrain from tears. Yet comfortable and sweet it was to see such lively and true expressions of dear and unfeigned love. But the tide (which stays for no man) calling them away that were thus loath to depart, their... pastor falling down on his knees (and they all with him), with watery cheeks commended them, with most fervent prayers, to the Lord and his blessing. And then with mutual embraces and many tears they took their leaves one of another; which proved to be the last leave to many of them’.

As the *Speedwell* headed out to the open sea, a volley of muskets was fired from the shore. It was echoed by three blasts from the ship’s cannons. ‘And so, lifting up our hands to each other and our hearts for each other to the Lord our God, we departed, and found his presence with us, in the midst of our manifest straits he carried us through’. The vessel grew small on the western horizon. They were gone.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For my small contribution to the telling of the Atlantic crossing in the *Mayflower*, see my *Voyage to Freedom*.

## *A Fruitful Development at Southwark*

Great searchings of heart

Judges 5:16

*A retracing of steps – London, 1599 – Jacob – his book – his move from Puritanism to Independency – the difference between Separatism and Independency – Jacob’s important statement on the church – forms the first Independent church – in some aspects not fully scriptural – the church flourishes*

We must now retrace our steps a little. Reader, you will be well aware that although a history is written in chapters, events do not move in isolation. They develop in parallel, not in compartments neatly packaged for the convenience of succeeding generations, authors in particular!

In 1610, John Robinson came into contact with an Englishman by the name of Henry Jacob who, it is possible, became a member of the Leyden church. This Henry Jacob was destined to have a great influence on Robinson’s view of church order. So much so, he turned Robinson from a Separatist into an Independent; this change in Robinson’s opinion I mentioned in the previous chapter. It is now time to deal with it more thoroughly. Independency itself came into existence some time between 1605 and 1609 through this man Henry Jacob. What is Independency?

The Separatists and Independents held similar views on most things. So close were the two, some even speak of the Independents as semi-Separatists. But there were clear differences between them in one or two points of church order. More on this in a moment. Just to say that some of the greatest Puritans in the coming years would belong to the Independents; John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Oliver Cromwell, William Bridge, Joseph Caryl, Jeremiah Burroughes and Philip Nye among them. The Independents, when their turn came, played a large part in the battle to recover New Testament church life and order. By 1645, Robert Baillie – a Scottish Presbyterian member of the Westminster Assembly – could say that the Independents were less than a thousand strong in London, yet they were of a very high spiritual calibre. ‘But, setting aside numbers, for other respects they are of so eminent a condition, that not any nor all the rest of the Sects are comparable to them’, he said.

This man, Henry Jacob, was born in Kent in 1553, and was educated at Oxford. Ordained an Anglican, he served for a while as a Church of England minister in his home county, but probably left for Holland in 1591

after he had become ‘a zealous Puritan minister’. If he did leave for the Low Countries at that time, it is certain he was back in England within a few years, since he was one of the Puritans who was appointed to confer with the Separatist, Francis Johnson, in the Clink in 1596. In this discussion, he urged Johnson to conform to the Church of England, claiming that the State Church was a true church, and its Articles were sufficiently scriptural for it to be called as much. He contended that ‘you ought not to separate from us nor to condemn us as wholly abolished from Christ’. Jacob hinted that Johnson and his fellow-Separatist friends were in prison because they were too scrupulous over details – details in ‘non-essential’ matters, to boot. Memories of Ridley and Hooper! However, there was no possibility of such different characters as Johnson and Jacob coming to an agreement over church order; there was no meeting of their minds on these matters. Be that as it may, the important point as far as this chapter is concerned is that in 1596 Jacob was a conforming Puritan. He wanted the State Church purified but he was quite happy with its order and government.

In 1599, Jacob published a book – or rather, two books in one – on the subject of church order. He brought this out in Middleburg in the Low Countries, close to the heart of Separatism, where Francis Johnson, now released from prison, was the pastor of the Ancient church. The volume was a broadside aimed directly at Johnson and the rest of the Separatists. It was entitled *A Defence of the Churches and Ministry of England written in two Treatises against the reasons and objections of Mr Francis Johnson*. The title was plain enough! In these two books, Jacob admitted that the Church of England was still plagued with ‘her corruptions’, it stood in need of further reform and it ought to be purified. But for all that, he claimed, the State Church was a true church. In other words, Jacob in 1599 was as yet a conforming Puritan. He had not moved his position.

About 1600, he became the minister of a gathered church of English exiles in Middleburg. But Jacob’s views were changing all the while, and by this time he was growing more and more dissatisfied with the condition of the Church of England. This discontent was encouraged by his frustrating experience over his contribution to the Millenary Petition which the Puritans presented to King James; it was even said that he ‘took a leading part’ in the affair. Disappointed by the failure of the Petition as played out in the sad farce at the Hampton Court Conference, Jacob’s time in the State Church soon came to an end, and he was silenced because he would no longer conform. This marked a very important change in his convictions and practice. He went on to publish a book, in 1604, on the necessity of reformation within the State Church, entitled *Reasons taken out of the Word of God for Reforming the Church of England*. In this latest

book, he showed that he had indeed moved his position to a considerable extent, since he now argued in defence of the Congregational system, and declared that the only visible church (he continued to use the word *visible*) is a particular, self-governing church. This meant, of course, that he was moving towards Separatism, having given up his conforming Puritan stance. He stated that he now believed the Congregational order was the pattern of the New Testament churches – the original churches – and that it had remained that way for two hundred years after Christ, until it was corrupted by the Fathers. From all this it certainly appears that he – and not Johnson – had been the more influenced by the talks in the Clink eight years before. It has been claimed that that is indeed the case. ‘The result being that Henry Jacob became a convert’ to something akin to Separatism, seems a fair estimate of the outcome of the dialogue between the two men. In his book, Jacob also asserted that the New Testament is the sole authority to determine church order, and argued it is wrong to alter the revealed pattern.

In 1605, or just after, he was back in England for a while, joining others in a *Humble Supplication* to King James, as one among several ‘silenced and disgraced ministers’ who now pressed for a measure of toleration. This is the *Supplication* I referred to in ‘Back to England’, where I pointed out that Jacob did not go as far in advocating religious toleration as Smyth and Helwys would seven years later. Jacob and his friends said that they were willing to maintain communion with the Church of England, and to pay all dues and taxes required both by the State and the Church, but they wanted some liberty of worship. In particular they asked for:

Permission to assemble together somewhere publicly to the service and worship of God, and to use and enjoy peaceably among ourselves alone the whole exercise of God’s worship and of church government, namely, by a pastor, elder, and deacons in our [separate churches] without any tradition of men whatsoever, according only to the specification of God’s written word and no otherwise.

The king for his part certainly read and studied this document, since his copy is extant and marked with marginal notes written in his own hand. But there was no possibility that the desires of Puritans – conforming or dissenting – let alone Separatists, would be granted by the James of Hampton Court. He who had bluntly demanded conformity or else was not going to be moved by any amount of *Supplications*, humble or otherwise.

Jacob published again – this time his *Principles and Foundations of the Christian Religion*. In this book, he defined the view of a church which he had now come to adopt. He wanted independent churches to be formed by the covenant principle – the principle which had been used by the secret

churches some forty years before, and was commonly employed by the majority of Separatists. He further argued that:

A true... church of Christ is a particular congregation, being a spiritual perfect corporation of believers, and having power in itself immediately from Christ to administer all religious means of faith to the members thereof. [Such a church exists] by a free mutual consent of believers joining and covenanting to live as members of a holy society together in all religious and virtuous duties as Christ and his apostles did institute and practice in the gospel.

He was not a full-blooded Separatist; what he wanted was Congregational churches, but of a non-Separatist form. In other words, he was advocating a hybrid somewhere in between the State Church and the Separatists. This hybrid became known as Independency.

The difference between the Separatists and the Independents, as implied above, was narrow, but very important for all that. They both maintained that each church should be distinct, separate, self-governing and independent; in that, they were agreed. But one major difference between them was in their attitude towards the State Church. The Separatists were convinced that the Church of England was not a true church, and since it was apostate and corrupt they would never attend any of its services. In fact, they would have nothing whatsoever to do with it; they were totally opposed to the whole notion of a State Church in any case. That was the position of the Anabaptists, the Brownists and the Barrowists; indeed, of all the Separatists of whatever shade, including Francis Johnson, Henry Ainsworth, John Smyth and John Robinson (until about 1610). The Independents, on the other hand, regarded the Church of England as a true, though mistaken, church – not apostate and altogether in the wrong. Occasional conformity with it was perfectly acceptable to them. Nor did they oppose the idea of a State Church. Quite the contrary. But the State Church would have looked very different under their system! Jacob, in his book of *Principles*, now proposed or argued that ‘each congregation in the Church of England is sufficient to determine its own policy and manage its own affairs without the necessity of assistance from archbishops and bishops, or even from classes or synods’. If he had got his way, the Church of England would have remained as the State Church, but each congregation would have been a distinct church. It would have changed radically in other respects as well. Whether this scheme ever had any hope of success is certainly open to doubt! Not only was Jacob not a Separatist, his words against ‘classes or synods’ show that he was not in favour of Presbyterianism either.

The point which Jacob made about each church ‘being a spiritual perfect corporation’ is weighty and of great significance. He did not mean that each separate or independent, self-governing church is perfect or

faultless, it goes without saying. He meant that each church, truly reformed and constituted according to the New Testament, has the right to exercise the full range of spiritual powers granted by Christ. Each true church has ‘power in itself immediately from Christ to administer all religious means of faith to the members thereof’, he declared. Every church, said Jacob, gathered in the scriptural way, has a right to ‘all religious and virtuous duties as Christ and his apostles did institute and practice in the gospel’. To modern ears, this may not sound much of a statement, but it was a great step in the battle to reform the church. It will be remembered that Smyth and Robinson, among others, also came to these views. We ought to be very grateful that men like Jacob, Smyth, Helwys and Robinson saw these things as clearly as they did and argued so strenuously for them. And how glad we ought to be that they got on with the job and put the reforms into effect.

In 1610, Jacob published a further book on the church. It was called *The Divine Beginning and Institution of Christ’s True, Visible and Ministerial church*. In this volume, he appealed once again for his stated Independent principles. This was also the year he met John Robinson. And it was this book of Jacob’s which contributed to Robinson’s change of opinion from Separatism to Independency.

Jacob published yet another book, in 1611, in which he argued that a church is a single congregation (he was anti-Presbyterian) and that its members have the right to appoint its pastors (in contrast to Francis Johnson). The church must be governed with the people’s consent, he said. In all this, it is possible to hear echoes of the various controversies which were raging in all the Separatist churches at the time.

He also took up the argument that the Church of England ministry had really come down through the Papacy, and owed its credibility to that line of descent. This was an important issue, one which was under vigorous debate. Rome was for ever taunting the Anglicans with the undeniable fact that their ministry – the Anglican’s ministry, that is – depended on the ordination of Cranmer, Ridley and all the rest of them. This, of course, had been a papal ordination. These men had then ordained others, and so on. Therefore, the Romanists sneered, the present Anglican ministers were dependent on the Papacy for their ministerial authority. Jacob agreed with the thrust of the Papists. It was so. The Papists were correct in this assertion if the Church of England persisted in its non-reformed ways, with its dependence on ministerial or apostolic succession. But if and when a church is properly reformed according to Scripture, things are very different, he maintained. Such a church is perfectly able to recognise and appoint its own ministers freely by the power and authority granted to it by

Christ. It possesses New Testament warrant for it, he declared. It is, as he had written in his *Principles*, ‘a spiritual perfect corporation’.

This point Jacob was making is yet another principle of the utmost importance. It is the power, the right or authority which belongs to every church to appoint its own ministers, which constitutes the New Testament warrant for ministerial authority; it is not any pretended succession of ministers, as the Papists and Anglicans claim. The truth is, the Papists had neatly pinned the Anglicans with their own sword. The Church of England, by clinging to the fanciful notion of apostolic descent, did rely on the Papacy for its warrant. It still does. But it was no use the Papists trying to do the same to men like Jacob. He snapped the blade in their hands. If there is real scriptural reformation – a big *if* in the case of the Church of England, it must be admitted – then the church in question goes back directly to the New Testament, he retorted. Its ministers then have full warrant for their authority. This is the true apostolic succession.

How vital a matter this is. A church can be properly formed or reformed today according to Scripture without the sanction of the Church of England, the Papacy or any other church. The timing of Jacob’s statement is significant – 1611. It will be remembered that within a few months the debate about succession would prove to be a point of contention between Helwys and Smyth. All the time they were close by in Amsterdam, of course.

As for the Papacy itself, it was to Jacob ‘the very Antichrist’, and no church could have any communion with it nor any ‘confidence in... that ministry’. But ‘Christ’s true ministers... have a better original’, he stoutly declared. This ‘original’ is the power which every church has, under Christ, to recognise its ministers. It will come to mind that John Robinson also stressed this very point, along with the argument that the authority of ministers extends only to the church which appoints them.

Jacob discussed all these and associated topics very thoroughly with Robinson and others in Holland before he came back to England in 1616; after which he continued to explore the issues further with other godly men in London. Finally, he took the plunge and he put his views into practical effect when he along with others established the first Independent church in Southwark. His deliberations had brought him to the conviction that they ought to covenant together to form a church according to their principles. It was recorded that:

Having seriously weighed all things and circumstances, Mr Jacob and some others sought the Lord about them in fasting and prayer together. At last it was concluded by the most of them that it was a very warrantable and commendable way to set up that course... whatsoever troubles should ensue. Henry Jacob was willing to adventure himself for the kingdom of Christ’s sake, [and] the rest encouraged him.

The governance of the Independent church was reduced to a twofold office with Henry Jacob as its appointed pastor, he being supported by deacons. The pastor preached and taught; the deacons shared in the oversight of the church and looked after the financial aspects of the work. Sadly, this view of church rule was to dominate such churches, besides largely affecting the majority of the Separatists in later years, when the single pastor became the norm, even though it is foreign to the New Testament. I have already made the point that all the New Testament churches had a plurality of elders. You will also remember that John Robinson advised the Leyden church not to be afraid to have more than one pastor (his word). Unhappily, most Nonconformist churches were content to use Henry Jacob's system of one pastor with several deacons.<sup>1</sup>

The Independent church also rejected set prayer. In addition, it observed the supper every Lord's day and not quarterly, as the Presbyterians did. It also emphasised the priesthood of all believers, which, in its turn, would play an important part in the development of Nonconformist thinking during the coming years.<sup>2</sup>

One area where the church still clung to the old Constantine ways and parted company with the Baptists, was in the view it took of the authority of the magistrate who, it was thought, should keep churches in good order. The churches 'ought to be overseen, and kept in good order, and peace, and ought to be governed under Christ... supremely, and also subordinately by the civil magistrate: yea, in causes of religion when need is', was Jacob's stated view. This was in sharp contrast to the Baptists, Smyth and Helwys – in addition to the Anabaptists, of course – who rejected all interference by the magistrate in church affairs. Thus the Independents kept to the common practice of the previous thirteen hundred years, leaving the Baptists and Anabaptists to take the minority, though scriptural, view. But in the process of time it was this minority view which would be seen by many to be the practice of the New Testament. The Independents, in company with Separatists, would eventually alter their opinion.

The Southwark Independent church being formed, the members immediately contacted the members of the Ancient church – at least the remnant of it surviving in London – whom they treated as brothers. They gave them notice of the points in which they agreed or disagreed with the Church of England. Jacob then published this Confession in order to avoid the charge of schism. In 1624, John Robinson advised the remnant of the Ancient Separatist church to recognise the Southwark Independent church.

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<sup>1</sup> See my forthcoming: *The Pastor: Does He Exist?*.

<sup>2</sup> See my forthcoming: *The Priesthood of All Believers*.

The Independent church flourished with Henry Jacob as pastor until he resigned in 1622 or thereabouts. He gave up his work in Southwark because he intended to emigrate. Accordingly, he left England in 1624 to go to Virginia, but he did not have long to live, dying there in 1625. However, the Southwark church continued and prospered with a series of godly men as pastors. We shall hear of it again – and not only in connection with the Independents. It made a large contribution to the progress of the battle to recover the church pattern found in Scripture. Within a few short years, some members of the Southwark church would be instrumental in the development of another church order. This development – one of enormous consequences – would come about by reason of harmonious divisions which occurred within the Independent church membership. This further advance will be the subject of a later chapter.

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Reader, do you not find the amount of work these Separatists and Independents managed to do for Christ simply amazing? The mere mention of the number of books they wrote, the Statements of Faith which they drew up, the churches they formed, and so on, and often in the most daunting, hostile circumstances, is enough to take our breath away, is it not? We have met this on numerous occasions in these pages. The challenge to us must be obvious. Granted that we cannot all be preachers, writers of books and all the rest of it, what *are* we doing for Christ? What efforts are we making to recover the church life of the New Testament? Or to encourage and maintain it when we find it? We are very busy these days, but busy doing what? Speaking for myself, I know I am a veritable Lilliputian in the presence of giants when I read of the exploits of these Separatists and Independents.

Again, what do you think of all the changes in their views? Are you shocked? The point is these people were pilgrims – they were seekers – seekers after Christ, seekers after truth.<sup>3</sup> And they were prepared to change their practices and opinions as they saw the teaching of the New Testament in a clearer light. This is the true and proper spirit of the Reformation, is it not? It is more – it is real Christianity. They thought through every doctrine, every principle, every practice, until they reached what they considered to be the biblical order; and then they obeyed, they put it into effect. Robinson, Smyth, Helwys, Jacob and their like tried to get to the bottom of every issue. Surely this is right. The question is, What about us? What about you? Is this attitude a true of reflection of you and your

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<sup>3</sup> This is not the same as the hyper-Calvinistic notion of the ‘seeking soul’.

church? Why do you do the things you do? Why do you believe and think the way you do? What is the basis for it? Is it because you were brought up in a certain way, you have always gone on in this way, but you have never really thought about it? Have you ever seriously searched the Bible to see if the things you do are really so? And are you prepared to change your opinion and practice as more Scripture light comes to you? Let us cultivate the Berean spirit (Acts 17:11).

Furthermore, these men and women challenge us with their sense of priorities. While they lived on earth their minds were set on heaven (Col. 3:1-2). They lived not for the world but for the gospel; for Christ, not self. They valued spiritual comforts above earthly pleasures and ease. They were not arguing about abstract points; it was church *life* in which they were interested. They realised how important this is, and they appreciated its many benefits. And whatever steps they had to take to get it, they would take them. We must examine ourselves in the light of this. Do we not excuse ourselves very often these days? If we do, to put it bluntly, are we ‘not carnal and behaving like mere men?’ (1 Cor. 3:3). Is our treasure on earth or in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21)? Do we seek things which are below or above?

You can see what a great contribution these saints made to the recovery of church life, to the reform of the church. And you can see why – you can sense the importance they placed on its proper order and practice. Reader, how important is church life to you? These men and women were simply not prepared to put up with second best. What are you prepared to put up with? They did not complain, wring their hands, sit down and do nothing. They struggled, they battled, they took all necessary steps, in order to get back to the New Testament. They wanted biblical church life. They were prepared to grapple with difficult ideas. They tried to put into practice what they knew to be right, and though they paid a high price they thought it was worth every penny, ‘whatsoever troubles should ensue’. Reader, what cost will you meet for church life? Of what value is it to you?

Yet again, what these early Separatists and Independents did, had a tremendous influence for good on generations to come. We must think of our unborn children. We may be but ‘stepping-stones unto others’, but let us be men, do our duty and trust in God to look after the consequences. We must not be self-centred and consider our ease. Do you ever think about the spiritual welfare of the coming generation? We have a responsibility to them. We shall have to answer for our discharge of that particular duty.

Paul wrote to Timothy, as he explained, ‘so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth’ (1 Tim. 3:15). The apostle was not thinking of the meeting house, of course, but the church,

the spiritual building of God. He gave Timothy the pattern for its order and life. In his second letter, Paul told him to ‘hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us’ (2 Tim. 1:13-14). And this responsibility extended to the next generation. ‘You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also’ (2 Tim. 2:1-2). This is the true and only apostolic succession. The men to whom Timothy committed the apostolic charge were to do the same to trustworthy and capable men after them. And so on. Our turn has now come. The responsibility has fallen upon our shoulders; we have ‘to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 3). Now it is our turn to guard the sacred deposit and trust which has been committed to us. And we must hand it on untarnished. We have to make sure the rising generation is given that same deposit and charge which was given to us. What inheritance, spiritually speaking, will we leave behind us? What we do, or what we do not do, will influence those who come after us – for good or ill! Is this not a solemn thought? It is indeed sobering. What a privilege it is to be able to do something for Christ.

## *'The Country of the Gadarenes'*

And suddenly the whole herd... ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished

Matthew 8:32

*London, 1625 – Charles I – his bad start – Laud – his rapid rise – his theology – end of Parliamentary government – the reign of terror – Baxter's testimony – Sibbes – his stance and his failure – Charles and Laud try to force Episcopacy on Scotland – the Bishops' Wars – political resistance – the Long Parliament – upheaval in religion – the Civil Wars*

James VI died in March, 1625. His sad and sordid life had done much damage to the church, but it was over at last. Well, his life was over – but was the damage? And what would his son do?

When Charles I came to the throne, being a serious-minded man, chaste and religious, it looked as though he had every prospect of a successful reign in front of him. The threat of a Spanish marriage, with all the consequent advancement of Popery which that would have entailed, had seemingly vanished with his marriage to Henrietta Maria of France. All the same, the queen was 'a pronounced Romanist who brought with her... some Romish priests'. What is more, by her marriage to Charles, Henrietta was in a position to ensure that popish influence was strengthened at Court. Nor did she miss her opportunity; she was a zealous builder on the foundation her late father-in-law, James, had laid. She was headstrong, not least in her eagerness to gain many concessions for the Catholic religion; throughout her reign she was the undoubted mistress at Whitehall, and Papal agents were openly cultivated in high places. Jesuits were encouraged to do their nefarious work; daily masses were notorious. Charles could only weakly reprimand his wife, but she carried on in her high-handed way regardless. She was far too strong for him.

All this meant that the royal marriage was a source of contention between the king and Parliament, seeing the latter became increasingly Puritan in outlook during the early years of the reign. Furthermore, the Puritans were offended right at the start by the ostentatious ritual and ceremony of the coronation on the 2nd of February, 1626. At the obnoxious performance, Charles was attended by five bishops in golden copes, the entire pageant being shown off against a tapestry backdrop decorated with a 'curiously wrought crucifix'. It all smacked too much of Romanism for Puritan tastes. Even so, it was far too Protestant for Henrietta to stomach, and she simply refused to attend! The man

responsible for the popish display was the up-and-coming cleric by the name of William Laud, he whom I mentioned earlier. Of this William Laud the world was destined to hear a great deal more.

James was dead, but his legacy was to prove disastrous for his heir; nor would it be very pleasant for the men and women in the realm who loved scriptural religion. They were in for a very harsh experience. The Duke of Buckingham, that notorious two-faced manipulator, was still a force to reckon with, while Laud cast his long and sinister shadow over the coming years. Again, it must be remembered that under James, Arminianism had replaced Calvinism in the upper reaches of the Church of England. What is more, the new king's political inheritance was complicated by foolish foreign treaties his father had concluded. These were serious handicaps right from the start; fatal handicaps, as it turned out. Yet it need not have been so. If Charles had only taken sensible advice, pursued a sane and straightforward policy, all could have gone relatively well.

But Charles was very badly advised right from the beginning, especially by the wretched Duke of Buckingham. That clever man, having observed the discord between Charles and his queen, milked it for all it was worth. Using much subtlety, he made artful suggestions to Charles, touching him at his weak spot, thus gaining a growing influence over the young king. This influence showed itself when Charles asked for a massive sum of money from Parliament, but declined to say why he wanted it. What would he do with the money? He would not say. Parliament resisted the king's two-faced demands. They knew the money would be spent in support of papist efforts in France to crush the Huguenots, even though Charles protested most solemnly he would not do anything to advance Popery. In other words, the king committed himself to two policies which contradicted each other. Parliament was alert enough not to let itself be duped, and it firmly refused his requests, which meant that for five years, 1625-1629, the king and Parliament were embroiled in a running verbal battle. They were forever quarrelling, nearly always over money.

In betrayal of his word, Charles did take steps to encourage Romanism both at home and in France, including the release of papist priests from English prisons. One MP complained of the king's duplicity, saying in a debate: 'I cannot believe he gave his pardon to a Jesuit, and that so soon upon his promise unto us'. It was growing increasingly obvious that Charles was prepared to treat Parliament with contempt and to fob off his critics with lies. He went further when he appointed an Arminian-cum-semi-Papist as Royal Chaplain, thereby challenging Parliament over the government and discipline of the Church of England. This led to yet another clash, since Parliament was in process of tinkering with its

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Constantine position on the relationship between State and Church; it now wanted the State to support the Church, but leave it more in control of its own affairs. In contrast, the king was going the other way; he hankered after a tighter grip on the reins of both State and Church. To forge them into one, and dominate both, was his dream. He needed an able man to help him. Enter William Laud.

William Laud, the rising star of the Church of England, was soon appointed the king's spiritual adviser. Laud, born in 1573, was educated at Oxford, and while there developed a life-long love of Arminianism with, obviously, a corresponding intense hatred of Calvinism. He earnestly desired to take the Church of England back to pre-Reformation practices, did all he could to encourage such a move, and virtually founded the Anglo-Catholic or High Church party. 'From the beginning to the end of his career Laud never wavered'. He gave voice to his popish tendencies when he alleged 'the necessity of baptism as the vehicle of regeneration, and the necessity of the episcopate to the existence of the true church'. Bancroft – spoken of earlier – had done his work well! Various promotions came Laud's way under King James, until he was appointed Bishop of St David's in 1621, in which capacity – in debate with a Jesuit – he openly stated that the Church of Rome was a true church. Charles took note and approved of this notion; as soon as he had the chance, he rapidly promoted Laud to Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1626, then Bishop of London in 1628, and finally, Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. It was not only Charles, however, who approved of his protégé's Romanising, and could dangle tempting promotions in front of him. Laud – even when he was Archbishop of the Church of England – was to receive more than one offer from the pope to become a Cardinal, as he himself recorded in his personal diary.

In all fairness, it has to be said that Laud was a very different man to the slippery Buckingham; at least he was honest and consistent in his principles. But those principles were staunchly Arminian, uncompromisingly so, 'thorough' being his watchword. In reality, Laud was a virtual Papist; he was even nicknamed 'a priest of Baal'. He loved the trappings of Popery, and brought them back into the Church of England with a vengeance. 'Roman varnish', as John Owen would later call them – 'paintings, crossings, crucifixes, bowings, cringings, altars, tapers, wafers, organs, anthems, litany rails, images, copes, vestments' – were the stuff of which Laud's religion was made. He forbade the clergy under his charge to preach on the doctrines of predestination and election. Nevertheless, Parliament resisted this growing tendency to Arminianism, and in the debate in 1629, already mentioned, one MP called it a Trojan horse for the advancement of Popery. The truth of this accusation was later borne out by

a document found among Laud's papers, annotated in the prelate's own hand, authenticating it as a letter from a Jesuit to his Superior in Brussels, dated March, 1628. The Jesuit reassured the Superior that things were going their way in England. 'We have planted that sovereign drug, Arminianism... it flourishes and bears fruit in due season. For the better prevention of the Puritans, the Arminians have already locked up the Duke's [that is, Buckingham's] ears... Our foundation is Arminianism'. This secret activity by Papists and Arminians admirably suited the purposes of Charles and Laud.

But it was not all done in secret. Overall, the man who had advanced Arminianism in the early years of the reign of James, had meanwhile gone on to propose that private confession should precede the Lord's supper. Then, in 1617, Richard Neile, at Durham, started talking about an altar, and moving the noxious article to the east end of the Church. Laud would certainly build on these suggestions. Indeed, he had been supported by Neile when he himself made the same changes at Gloucester – the very place where Hooper had laboured some sixty years before! It will be recalled that under James, Bancroft had been held in check on the introduction of these sinister developments. But times were very different now. King Charles, right from the start, made his father's slide into Arminianism seem like a genteel drift; now it was to be the Gadarene rush to the precipice. The Arminians, Neile and Laud, along with Mr Facing-All-Ways, Buckingham, beavered away, demolishing Calvinism in the State Church on every hand. But Charles led from the front – he was the architect of the revolution; and, as I explained earlier, a revolution it was. In 1626, Charles, through Buckingham, foisted an Arminian Chancellor on Oxford University, making it an anathema to support the findings of Dort within the University. The House of Commons might complain about such goings-on, as it did in 1629, but Charles simply ignored all protest.

The teaching of the Canons of Dort was stopped on the grounds that the doctrine of predestination destroyed sacramental teaching and practice. Just so! Whereas the Bible teaches that God accomplishes his decrees of saving grace through the means of preaching, the Arminians *cum* Papists replaced preaching with the so-called sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. According to this, instead of sinners being called to salvation through the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:9-17; 1 Cor. 1:17-24), baptised infants were started on the process of salvation by their baptism, after which a life-time of regular attendance at Confession and Communion maintained it. This was, as ever, the high road to popish priesthood.

A liberal in theology, Laud was anything but liberal in his attitude towards those who disagreed with him – Puritans, Separatists,

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Independents or Anabaptists. He was ‘thorough’, cruel and bitter in persecution, a sadist, a firm believer in torture for heretics. This was the kind of talk which appealed to Charles. As early as 1626, the king promised his man the see of Canterbury, since Laud was a most suitable incumbent in the eyes of Charles. After all, Laud proved his worth when he preached at the opening of Parliament that same year, declaring that Presbyterianism would mean the overthrow of both Church and State. In other words, Presbyterianism or Calvinism in any shape or form was to be accounted treason under the new regime. Parliament replied that the opposite was the truth; it was the Arminians who, by bringing in Popery, were the real revolutionaries. Nevertheless, Laud and the king rode roughshod over all opponents, and they triumphed. The upshot of all this foment was that Calvinism languished sorely, the Presbyterians were reduced to a mere handful, and the Calvinistic Anglicans completely failed to withstand the onslaught. The Church of England simply became Arminian and popish. Laud supplied the king with a list of ministers, marked *O* and *P*. The *Orthodox*, in Laud’s eyes, were to be elevated; the *Puritans* were to be despised and humiliated.

But all this constituted far more than an attack upon Puritanism. As the years passed, Arminianism and absolutism would become one and the same in the public eye. The king had broken with the Calvinistic past, and he increasingly presented himself as an absolute monarch. No one would be allowed to question his actions. He became a tyrant.

Undoubtedly, the notes of the Geneva Bible, which still held on to its popularity among the Calvinists, despite all attempts to impose the Authorised Version on them, encouraged some Puritans to preach openly of the rightness of resistance to the king under such circumstances as were beginning to prevail. One Nathaniel Barnard did so as early as 1632, foreshadowing the preachings of Stephen Marshall and many others during the actual Civil Wars a decade later. The early warning signs were there, if only the king had a mind to read them.

The reason is, the Genevan notes, greatly valued by countless avid readers for their theological stance, included what were seen to be various political and ‘seditious’ comments, though these formed only a small part of the whole. Nevertheless, these particular glosses were seized on by the growing number – during the 30s and 40s – who were looking for justification of resistance to a tyrannical king. After all, the comments carried enormous weight, being printed alongside the Scriptures themselves and backed by the authority of Geneva. The Authorised Version had represented a political attempt to put a stop to any thought of resistance to the monarch, but this it signally failed to do when it mattered most to the king – the last copy of the Geneva Bible coming off the press

in 1644. (Even as late as 1715, the Genevan notes were still being printed with the AV text).

To give but a single example of the point I am making: Psalm 110:3 in the Genevan version reads: ‘Thy people shall come willingly at the time of assembling thine army’. It does not take much imagination to see what telling use that could be put to in the turbulent decades of the 17th century, and how in certain quarters it might be preferred to the new version of King James.

Following one of the wrangles between Parliament and the king over money, Charles suspended Parliament for several months and governed, or tried to, on his own. But eventually out of sheer necessity – the need to raise ready cash – he was forced to summons another sitting. He used a trick to get round his opponents, promoting some of them to an office which debarred them from actually taking their place as MPs and voting against him. For all that, even now he could not get his way, whereupon he dissolved Parliament again. As the months passed, relations went from bad to worse. The king tried to raise a ‘loan’; he wanted to debase the coinage; he sent the eager Buckingham on mad ventures against the Huguenots – rash schemes which wasted a fortune. Charles, who believed in the Divine Right of Kings, received much-needed support and encouragement when some Anglicans argued that the king had the power to make laws which his subjects were bound to obey; that his legislative power was unbounded; that he could raise taxes without consent of Parliament. One Church of England minister preached ‘the duty of passive obedience to the king even when his commands were opposed to Scripture’. Another went as far as to state that disobedience to the king would lead to eternal damnation!

In 1628, Buckingham was assassinated, which meant that the king, having lost his public shield, was now exposed to the full fury of political criticism. If Buckingham could ever be truly called a friend, his murder meant that Charles was at once friendless and isolated from advisers; he was surrounded by lackeys and yes-men. More important, Buckingham’s death also led to the further advancement of Laud, a process attended with high significance. In truth, Laud was promoted though he never respected the king; in reality, he despised his want of greatness and lack of grip. But that was just what Laud himself did not lack. He knew what he wanted and he got it. Decisive and aggressive in leadership, he set about making the Church what he thought it ought to be, knocking aside whoever stood in his way. He more than adequately filled the gap left by Buckingham.

That same year the king accepted a *Petition of Right* in which he promised ‘to defend the people’s liberties’, vowed he would not raise money by taxation without Parliament’s consent, nor exercise justice without due regard for the law. If only he had meant it. But he treated the

*Petition* with contempt, and his word was worthless. Within a few weeks he was mooted yet another scheme of taxation. Nevertheless, the Commons dug its heels in, whereupon Charles promptly dissolved his third Parliament, thereby ruling without it for the next eleven years.

By the time of the Dissolution, Laud and Charles had come to hate all notion of Parliamentary government, and now that they were free of its constraint they were able to set about the Puritans with a will. They made thorough use of the High Commission and the Star Chamber, courts which amounted to an English Inquisition. Laud promoted his allies to the bench of bishops. In his quest to drag the Church of England back towards Rome, he let no grass grow under his feet, neither during his time as Chancellor of Oxford – which appointment he received in 1630 – nor especially in his reign as Archbishop.

He also began to put forward a disquieting theory – disturbing from Charles' point of view, that is. He declared that the king was not master in the Church, but was under the authority of the clergy. In essence, under Laud! He so dominated the scene, and reigned with such terror, that during the eleven years without a Parliament, four thousand Puritans fled to New England, about seventy of whom were ministers. Laud was immensely pleased with himself over this huge exodus, stupidly ignoring the grievous loss to the country. He had opened a wound from which the life-blood of the nation poured out. Thus the realm lost some of its finest, most godly, hardest-working citizens, while Laud thought himself clever! At all events, the departure of Puritans, Separatists and others suited his purposes; he was determined to bring Popery back to England, and to do that he knew that he must destroy Puritanism.

And he knew what the heart of Puritanism was; it was Calvinism. Matthew Brooks, the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, had expressed his view to Archbishop Abbot in 1630 that the 'doctrine of predestination is the root of Puritanism, and Puritanism is the root of all rebellions and disobedient untractableness in Parliament, etc., and of all schism and sauciness in the country; nay, in the Church itself'. This was Laud's own opinion; therefore he set about the demolition of Calvinism with fanatical zeal, the preaching of the doctrines of grace was outlawed, and all who stood in his way were forced to feel the lash of his whip.

Alexander Leighton was one such; he wrote *An Appeal to Parliament: Zion's Plea Against Prelacy*. Expressing himself in very strong terms, he put together 'a slashing attack upon hierarchy' in which he called the queen 'a daughter of Heth, a Canaanite and an idolatress'. This was regarded as treason and blasphemy, for which 'crime' he was summoned to the Star Chamber in 1630. Not allowed to utter a word, he was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Fleet, plus a fine of £10,000 – a massive sum

for the time.<sup>1</sup> One ear was cut off, his nose slit, and one cheek branded with a red-hot iron. He was tied to a post and whipped, every lash ripping away flesh. A week later the branding was repeated on the other side of his face. He was clapped in irons under a leaky roof, half-starved and given no bedding. No wonder ‘his hair and skin came off’. His house was ransacked, his wife ‘misused’ and his children terrified. On hearing of the sentence, Laud lifted his cap and thanked ‘God who has given me the victory over my enemies’. Leighton spent ten long years languishing in prison, and was only released by the Long Parliament, but by that time he could hardly see, hear or walk.

Leighton was not the only one to suffer; many fell foul of Laud’s cruel measures. A Devonshire preacher, John Heyden, dared to preach even though forbidden. For this ‘offence’ he was sent to Bridewell, whipped and sentenced to hard labour ‘confined in a cold, dark dungeon during the whole winter, being chained to a post in the middle of a room, with irons on his hands and feet, having no other food but bread and water, and a pad of straw to lie on’. Another man was fined £500 – for breaking a stained glass window!<sup>2</sup>

Laud used his power as Archbishop and his influence over the king to put into full effect his hatred of the Puritans. He enforced the Elizabethan Settlement, applied it with far more rigour than ever Elizabeth herself did, not allowing ‘the least difference’ in any matter. Constantinian concepts were put into effect with a vengeance, so that State and Church became one, politics and religion were virtually indistinguishable, and private judgement was not allowed. Laud’s ‘worship of unity was an idolatry, his detestation of faction a superstition. Church and State [were] one Jerusalem’. In his own words, bearing in mind that by ‘Commonwealth’ Laud meant ‘State’ – he was not referring ‘in advance’ to the 1649-1660 republic:

Both Commonwealth and Church are collective bodies, made up of many into one; and both so near allied that the one, the Church, can never subsist but in the other, the Commonwealth; nay, so near, that the same men, which in a temporal respect make the Commonwealth, do in a spiritual make the Church... Jerusalem... stands not for the City and the State only... nor for the Temple and the Church only, but jointly for both.

Not only was this utterly alien to the New Testament, here was the making of a disaster of the first order. Church and State welded into one body? What if the one should fall? The other would collapse with it. Under Charles and Laud, Church and State were heading for a disaster of

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<sup>1</sup> My best guess is at least £2,000,000 today (2011).

<sup>2</sup> My best guess is at least £100,000 today (2011).

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cataclysmic proportions. It would not be long before the explosive mixture would blow up in their faces.

For years, the membership of Church and State had been virtually one and the same, equally compulsory for all. The Government had used the Church – its organisation, its pulpits, its entire fabric – to inform and regulate the people. In short, Christendom was a virtual police-state. And, if need be, the magistrates carried the sword to make sure things were done exactly as the authorities determined. Laud now forged this system in iron. Puritanism was regarded as blasphemy; dissent was the unforgiveable sin. He knew that as the authority of Scripture increasingly gripped men's minds so the authority of the State Church would decline. He was right! Bent on avoiding this at all costs, Laud dominated the nation in a terror of 'whippings, croppings, slittings, brandings and gaolings', making sure his discipline 'should be felt as well as spoken of'. An atmosphere of fawning flattery filled the Court and the Church as 'men flocked to Laud for benefices or appointments, and preachers vied with each other to make flattering mention of the king'. Under Laud's influence, Charles, the Court and the Church became entrenched in Arminianism and papistry to the extent that it could be openly stated: 'Roman Catholic doctrines... be the doctrines of the Church of England'. Many Anglican ministers neglected their work, were lazy or downright incompetent; abuses multiplied as external form was emphasised and inward spirituality was ignored. The State Church from Tudor times had used the clergy as police informers to hold down opposition; now it was said their chief use was to defend the Church and State.

One authority has declared:

The persecution of the Puritans in the time of the Stuarts, on account of Canons and rubrics, was, in too many cases, neither more nor less than zeal for traditions. An enormous amount of zeal was expended in enforcing conformity to the Church of England, while drunkenness, swearing, and open sin were comparatively let alone. Obedience to man-made ecclesiastical rules was required, on pain of fine or imprisonment, while open disobedience to God's ten commandments was overlooked. Experience supplies painful proof, that traditions once called into being are first called *useful*. Then they become *necessary*. At last they are too often made *idols*, and all must bow down to them, or be punished.

Let us never forget this vital point. Hooper had been right. Ridley and Cranmer had been wrong. Non-scriptural novelties soon become essentials. But it is not good enough to agree with this in retrospect, in a warm historical glow. We must be practical and apply it to our own times, to our churches. Let us see to it that we do not repeat past mistakes; if we do, we may reap past judgements (Gal. 6:7).

It can be no surprise to learn that Laud's policy forced a reaction among the politicians who, in sharp contrast to the Church of England, became more and more Puritan and Calvinistic in outlook. So much so, political Puritanism almost assumed the form of an actual party or body during this time. This would have a devastating effect within a few years. Laud was sowing the seeds of war. The two sides were polarising.

Laud not only suppressed the Geneva Bible; he fetched ammunition from the reign of James by a reissue of the *Book of Sports*. This *Book*, it will be recalled, well-nigh authorised morris dancing, archery and like pursuits to follow morning worship. It was directed especially against the Puritan view of the Lord's day. Charles now went further than his father, James, in that he removed all restrictions on the games, and compelled ministers to read the *Book or Declaration of Sports* – as it was now called – from the Church of England pulpits on a specified Sunday. The measure was said to regulate the sports. Regulate? It was a virtual licence, an incitement, to engage in the games. In other words, far from preaching against carnal behaviour, ministers were now obliged to encourage their hearers to play games on the Lord's day, to engage in the barbarities of bear- and bull-baiting. This, it goes without saying, was utterly repugnant to the Puritans, but refusal by a minister meant his expulsion from the pulpit. Many opted for ejection.

Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of the membership of the Church of England were highly gratified. Naturally, the unregenerate masses loved a religion where they felt they were actually encouraged by their spiritual guides – even pressed – to indulge themselves on Sundays. The queen infuriated the Puritans by the way she openly amused herself with plays and dances at Court, and thus defiled the day. The *Declaration* only met its death in May, 1643, at the hands of the Long Parliament, who issued an order for its burning by the public hangman. By then it had done untold harm. Richard Baxter recalled how his boyhood Sundays had been spoiled by it. He said:

I cannot forget that in my youth in those late times, when we lost the labours of some of our conformable godly teachers for not reading the *Book of Sports and Dancing* on the Lord's days, one of my father's own tenants was the town piper... and the place of the dancing assembly was not a hundred yards from our door, and we could not on the Lord's day either read a chapter, or pray, or sing a psalm, or catechise, or instruct a servant, but with the noise of the pipe and tabor, and the shoutings in the street, continually in our ears; and even among a tractable people we were the common scorn of all the rabble in the streets, and called Puritans, Precisions and Hypocrites, because we rather chose to read the Scriptures than to do as they did (though there was no savour of Nonconformity in our family). And when the people by the *Book* were allowed to play and dance out of public service time, they could so hardly break off

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their sports that many a time the reader was minded to wait till the piper and the players would give over; and sometimes the morris dancers would come into the church in all the linen and scarves, and antic dresses, with morris bells jingling at their legs. And as soon as Common Prayer was read, did haste out presently to their play again. Was this a heavenly conversation? Was this a help to holiness and devotion?

Young Baxter was, at first, attracted by the tomfoolery, but, as he said: ‘When I heard them call my father Puritan it did much to cure me and alienate me from them; for I considered that my father’s exercise of reading the Scripture was better than theirs, and would surely be better thought on by all men at the last’.

Laud’s measures certainly attained their purpose; godly teachers were silenced while the profane rabble ruled the proceedings of the Church of England. The Archbishop of Canterbury effectively produced countless congregations which were utterly unprepared for the worship of God. They grudgingly gave the reader a few minutes to gabble off the prayers, while they took a breather in between their pagan games. How rarely the heavenly beings must have rejoiced over sinners coming to repentance under these conditions (Luke 15:7)! And very few saints could have found themselves edified. As the above quotes show, Baxter’s father – a Puritan, but decidedly no Separatist – preferred to keep his family away from public service, and tried to maintain spirituality at home, seeing there was precious little of it to be found in the Church of England. Typical of Laud’s idea of worship was his instruction to the clergy ‘to go in perambulation of the circuit of the parish’ – a superstitious nonsense which involved a ‘procession once a year round the parish boundaries, the recitation of prayers and psalms at stated intervals along the route... and finally, of course, the consumption of much food and drink’.

The Star Chamber and High Commission Courts put the bishops above the law, and at the same time enabled Charles to raise huge sums of money, always a desperate necessity at Court; two birds, one stone. A minor offence against the State Church brought a big fine; any man who preached against Popery or Arminianism was forced to pay a very large amount for the period, £1000.<sup>3</sup> By these means, during the eleven years of non-Parliamentary government, Puritanism was practically silenced, Puritan lecturers were muzzled, and the number of silenced and deprived ministers grew rapidly under the cruel reign of Laud, ‘the little, low, red-faced man’. Puritans were abused, mocked and treated like criminals. Many could be recognised at a glance by livid scars upon their cheeks. Some bore letters burned into the flesh, *SL* standing for *Seditious Libeller*,

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<sup>3</sup> See the earlier notes for present-day values.

or SS for *Sower of Sedition*. One sufferer wittily quipped it ought more properly to be called the *Stigmata of Laud*. It has been justly said:

The catalogue of famous men, who, at one time or another, during Laud's day of power, were prosecuted, silenced, fined, imprisoned, or driven to retire to the Continent, is a melancholy roll [list], and of itself speaks volumes. John Rogers, Daniel Rogers, Thomas Hooker, Dod, Hildersham, Ward, Cotton, Bridge, Ames, Sheppard, Burroughes, Greenhill, Calamy, Whateley, Wilkinson, Goodwin, were all men who had more divinity in their little fingers than Laud had in his whole body. Yet everyone of them was visited with Laud's displeasure, and, in one way or another, disgracefully treated. In short, the public came to the conclusion that Laud and his companions thought Puritanism a greater sin than open immorality, and trifling acts of nonconformity worse than breaking the ten commandments! It really came to this, that men said you might lie, or swear, or get drunk, and little notice would be taken; but to be a Puritan, or a Nonconformist, was to commit the unpardonable sin!

The carnal observance of the Lord's day during the time of Richard Baxter's youth has just been referred to. He also spoke of the dearth of preaching brought about by the measures of James and Charles, especially as enforced by Laud. He said:

We lived in a country that had but little preaching at all. In the village where I was born there were four readers successively in six years time, ignorant men, and two of them immoral in their lives... In the village where my father lived there was a reader of about eighty years of age that never preached, and had two churches about twenty miles distant [a huge distance in those days]. His eyesight failing him, he said Common Prayer without book; but for the reading of the psalms and chapters he got a common thresher and day-labourer one year, and a tailor another year (for the clerk could not read well); and at last he had a kinsman of his own (the most excellent stage-player in all the country, and a good gamester and good fellow) that got Orders and supplied one of his places. After him another younger kinsman... And at the same time another neighbour's son... one who... ventured to preach... and when he had been a preacher about twelve or sixteen years he wanted to give over, it being discovered that his Orders were forged by the first ingenious stage-player. After him another neighbour's son took Orders, when he had been... a common drunkard, and tippled himself into so great a poverty that he had no other way to live... These were the schoolmasters of my youth (except two of them) who read Common Prayer on Sundays and Holy Days, and taught school and tippled on the weekdays, and whipped the boys, when they [that is, the masters] were drunk... Within a few miles about us were near a dozen more ministers that were near eighty years old apiece, and never preached; poor ignorant readers, and most of them of scandalous lives. Only three or four constant competent preachers lived near us, and those (though conformable all save one) were the common marks of the people's obloquy and reproach, and any that had but gone to hear them, when he had no preaching at home, was made the derision of the vulgar rabble under the odious name of a Puritan... In

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the village where I lived the reader read the Common Prayer briefly, and the rest of the day even till dark night almost, except eating time, was spent in dancing under a maypole and a great tree not far from my father's door, where all the town did meet together.

Richard Sibbes, reckoned to be second only to William Perkins in the pulpit, was one of the best-known Puritans to be attacked by Laud, but all the same he survived as the preacher at Gray's Inn from 1618 until he died in 1635. As early as 1611, Laud had removed Sibbes from his Lectureship at Cambridge, but it was after 1627 that he attacked him with resolution. In that year, Sibbes, with three other Puritans, wrote a letter to the king concerning 'the lamentable distresses of two hundred and forty godly preachers, with their wives and families, and sundry thousands of godly private persons with them, cast out of their house and homes, out of their callings and countries, by the fury of the merciless Papists' in the region of Bohemia. Laud saw the letter and certainly studied it, for he marked it with special reference to Sibbes, even correcting the spelling of his name. The four Puritans were summoned to appear before the Star Chamber where they were made out to be 'notorious delinquents' for this 'offensive' letter. Even so, Sibbes continued to preach and publish, openly denouncing the criticism he had received for his sympathy with suffering Christians. Spies, who attended his preaching, besides that of many others, then duly reported back to their pay-master. But Sibbes survived.

In one important respect, however, Sibbes repeated the failure of the previous generations. In company with many other conforming Puritans of the time, he refrained from 'the controversies of the day'. Like Perkins before him, he did not push for a thorough reform of church order, even though he himself held convictions about the need of it within the State Church. The truth is, he was exceedingly loath to contemplate Nonconformity; he certainly 'had no wish for separation'. But neither did he openly strive for reform of the Church of England from within. This was wrong.

While thousands of Puritans left the country, many, like Sibbes, persisted in preaching the gospel in defiance of Laud's measures. One bishop complained that the resourceful Puritans would use 'the running lecture so-called, because the lecturer went from village to village, and at the end of the week proclaimed where they would have him next, that his disciples might follow'. Many people deserted the parish Church so that it was empty when the Anglican recited the Prayer Book, but 'then immediately filled up to hear the Puritan preacher in his Geneva cloak'.

But – and it is essential to give the whole picture – it was not only conforming Puritans who suffered under Laud. Far from it. The Separatists, of all opinions, were not exempt; they did not escape. Thomas

Brewer, ‘a Baptist preacher’, was gaoled for fourteen years. The Anglican Convocation of 1640 pronounced ‘that the Canon... against Papists shall be in full force against all Anabaptists, Brownists, Separatists and other sectaries’. Samuel Howe, a Baptist minister, died in prison, and his corpse was degraded by burial in the highway. And as late as 1642, the king was even yet clamouring for measures to ‘stop the over-hasty growth of Anabaptism and other schisms’. The poor, despised Separatists – along with the conforming Puritans – suffered much, so that ‘the trials for active dissent under Laud are the records of the poor, seized at their worship and confronted with the might of Church and State in the High Commission’. Both the conforming Puritans and the Separatists were included in this, but the stress is to be placed on the latter. This is evident in the reference to ‘the poor’.

Several courageous men, in addition to Leighton, published against the tyranny in direct contravention of the Star Chamber Decree. A wag pinned a card to the gate of St Paul’s. It read: ‘The Devil has let this house to Laud for the saying of Mass’. It was not a joke. Nor is it a laughing matter today! One William Prynne wrote in very strong terms – so strong that he has been much criticised, but in light of Laud’s terror such strong feeling can surely be understood. In one of his books Prynne exposed the immoralities of the stage, a pastime much loved by the queen. Not mincing his words, he also truthfully declared that Laud ‘has traitorously and wickedly endeavoured to reconcile the Church of England with the Church of Rome’. For these ‘offences’, Prynne lost both his ears, was given a massive £5000 fine and sentenced to life imprisonment. A certain Dr John Bastwicke, a Colchester physician, wrote in defence of the plain and obviously true proposition that a bishop and an elder are one and the same in the New Testament. For this, he was no longer allowed to practice as a physician, he was excommunicated, fined £1000 and sentenced to imprisonment until he cared to recant.<sup>4</sup> A minister, Henry Burton, who preached two sermons against novelties in the Church of England, was imprisoned for several years. Despite the severe punishment they received, men of this calibre continued to write, and a stream of pamphlets poured out, even from the prisons! Prynne, Bastwicke and Burton pooled their efforts to produce a tract called *News from Ipswich*, for which Prynne had the stumps of his ears hacked off, and was then branded *SL*, while the other two prisoners had their ears cropped. Prynne was defiant, calling out ‘the more I am beat down, the more I am lift up’. A woman’s voice encouraged him out of the crowd, saying ‘there are many hundreds which by God’s assistance would willingly suffer for the cause you suffered this day’.

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<sup>4</sup> See the earlier notes for present-day values.

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Bastwicke's wife took her husband's ears and kissed them. Then all three men were sentenced to solitary confinement off-shore, no paper, pen or ink being allowed!

During Prynne's trial, Laud delivered a speech which plainly revealed his Romanism. Taking up Bancroft's theme and building on it, he spoke of the altar – in this context, a popish word in itself – and compared it with the pulpit, saying:

The altar is the greatest place of God's residence upon earth. I say the greatest, yea, greater than the pulpit, for there it is: 'This is my body', but in the pulpit it is: 'This is my word'. And a greater reverence, no doubt, is due to the body than to the word of our Lord; and so to the throne where his body is actually present, than to the seat where his word [is] proclaimed.

This was nothing less than unadulterated Popery from the lips of an Archbishop of Canterbury. The New Testament, it goes without saying, knows nothing of this ritualistic view of the Lord's supper; its emphasis is clearly upon the preaching of the gospel, and not upon the supper, in any case. A simple comparison between the space given to preaching and the Lord's supper in the New Testament will bear out this claim. The scriptural priority is always teaching above the supper. (See Acts 2:42, for example). How often do the Scriptures record that Paul preached, and how often do they record that he administered the Lord's supper? I do not belittle the supper by this – but we dare not give it a prominence which the New Testament does not. Laud certainly did give it undue emphasis, besides alleging things about the ordinance that are manifestly untrue. He was decidedly in the wrong when he said that the body of Christ is 'actually present' in the Lord's supper. It is not. To say it is, constitutes a blasphemous lie.

What is more, there is no altar in the church of God except the one mentioned in Hebrews 13:10, 'we have an altar'. This statement, it need not be said, does not refer to a material altar, nor does it refer to the Lord's table, which is always called a table and never an altar (1 Cor. 10:21). The Lord's supper is never called a sacrifice. The altar of Hebrews 13:10 is none other than Christ himself. He is priest, altar and sacrifice. He is the fulfilment of all the Old Testament shadows. To introduce a physical altar into the church, and then set men apart as priests in order that they make a sacrifice upon that altar, shows the utmost blasphemy and highest contempt of the one finished sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 10:9-14). It is damnable.

Despite opposition, Charles and Laud persisted in their sadistic folly, which only served to unite the common people against them. Thus, in trying to exterminate Puritanism and Separatism, they actually succeeded in stirring the people to defy their rulers' exercise of absolute power. While

it is certain that only a tiny minority of the population were truly spiritually minded and wanted scriptural reform of the State Church, nevertheless the king madly drove the mass of the citizens into a corner. There could be only one outcome.

Charles let his madness run riot in 1637 when he tried to take Episcopacy into Presbyterian Scotland, the land of Knox, into a country and among a people he ‘had never either understood or liked’. But even here, as in England, it was really Arminianism which stuck in the Presbyterian gullet, not bishops. After all, the Scots had managed with a form of Episcopalianism for forty years – they would only throw off bishops at the 1638 Assembly – so that many of them had never known a fully Presbyterian system. Even Robert Baillie, usually regarded as a Presbyterian through and through, was not prepared to say that some form of Episcopacy was without scriptural warrant. In other words, Baillie and his friends would have tolerated a moderate Episcopalianism, if it had been Calvinistic. As I say, it was not so much the office of bishop which rankled with the Scots – it was the Arminianism of the bishops which Laud would have imposed upon them. That was the trouble. The Arminianism would lead to Popery, and *that* the Scots would not tolerate at any price. Calvinism was wanted by them. Indeed their Assembly modelled itself on the pattern of Dort.

Notwithstanding, Laud was determined to impose the Prayer Book north of the border, but in trying to do it he was faced with a riot which broke out in Edinburgh. No wonder, since in the Book ‘the real presence [of Christ in the Lord’s supper was] as plainly taught as any Papist could wish... [so that it set] all Scotland in a flame by attempting to introduce it in public worship’. That was the point. Popery was intended by Laud, and Popery the Scots would not have. One remarkable woman, Jenny Geddes, threw her stool at the minister. ‘Will you read that mass-book in my ear?’ she demanded of him. There it was again – the Scots would not have the ‘mass-book’. Charles and Laud would not back down, however, but insisted on compliance, blaming the bishops for their lack of courage in not forcing through the measures. For all that, the Scots would not be brow-beaten and their opposition was resolute. One wrote graphically:

The rotten dregs of Popery, which were never purged away from England and Ireland, and having once been spewed out with detestation, are licked up again in Scotland... [The Church of England] is miscoloured with the painted lustre of the mother of Harlots. Her shamefast forehead has received the mark of the beast, her lovely-locks are frizzled with the curls of antichrist fashions, her chaste ears are made to listen to the friends of the great Whore.

This time the king had gone too far; he had ‘bitten off more than he could chew’. In 1638, the defiant Scots renewed the National Covenant, a

petition drawn up for signature by all those who desired to register a protest. The first Covenant had been put in place in 1581 for those who vowed they would defend the country against Popery. To this very Covenant, clauses were now added to the end that Presbyterianism must be the State Church order in Scotland. It met with a huge response; three hundred thousand people signed, some adding ‘until death’ after their name, while ‘some did draw their own blood and use it in place of ink’.

Conflict was bound to follow. Laud dug his heels in, and stubbornly pronounced he was ‘determined to be obeyed’. The Scots, for their part, stoutly replied that they would ‘never have the Book’. The 1638 Assembly refused to let itself be dissolved, but went on to denounce Episcopacy, the Prayer Book and Laud. Charles was left with a stark choice. He could either yield, or he could raise an army, go to war and try to defeat the Scots – his own subjects! In his madness, he opted for war. But, without a Parliament, he had insufficient money to raise enough men. Even so, he tried to fight. It was a vain hope and the First Bishops’ War soon ended, when Charles was brought to terms at Berwick.

The peace was uneasy, however, while Charles played for time. Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, now all-powerful at Court, politically speaking, proposed that Parliament should be recalled in order to provide sufficient money to raise an army. It is clear that the king and his advisers had taken leave of their senses! An increasingly Presbyterian Parliament to be asked to vote money to wage war on Presbyterian Scots? What utter folly! Recalled in 1640, the Short Parliament lasted only three weeks before it, too, met the common fate and was dissolved! Rightly, it would not even consider voting money for the king before the many grievances of the past eleven years had been addressed.

Strafford remained arrogantly confident despite this set-back. He bragged that he could raise an army of ten thousand Irish – ten thousand Papists, in other words – to defeat the Scots, after which they would bring the English to heel. Nevertheless, there was one difficulty which even the ever-optimistic Strafford could not get round. It was the old question once again – money. Therefore, Charles dreamt up new taxes; the queen wanted to ask the pope for the wherewithal; high offices were sold for cash; Strafford went cap-in-hand to papist Spain; and the worth of the coinage was debased to a quarter of its value. Nor was Laud idle all this time. He saw to it that new Canons were passed within the Church of England to increase the power of the king even more.

But by this time the king and his counsellors were living in a fantasy world, in ‘cloud-cuckoo land’. Their end was in sight. Riots broke out, and Laud only narrowly escaped with his life at Lambeth. Then alarming news came – the Scots were on the march! Charles and Strafford scrambled

together a make-shift army, and took it north to meet the Scots in the field. But the king's cause was hopeless, and he was forced to agree to yet another treaty to cobble together an uneasy peace, this time at Ripon. The Second Bishops' War was over. It was significant that by this treaty the Scots allowed Charles two months free of war, as long as he called a Parliament. Accordingly, on the 3rd of November, 1640, the Long Parliament began its sitting.

The country had now reached an appalling state of disorder. 'The judges have overthrown the law, and the bishops the gospel', just about summed it up. Parliament, overwhelmingly Puritan, took a grip on things before total anarchy descended upon the nation. It declared that its will must prevail, and prevail it did. Strafford was sent to the Tower, as was Laud; the former being executed in 1641, Laud in 1645. Meanwhile, Laud's victims were released, among them Prynne, Burton, Bastwicke and Leighton. The latter crawled from his prison after ten years in a 'loathsome and ruinous dog-hole, full of rats and mice'. By this time, he was a broken wreck of a man, aged seventy-two, and his pitiful appearance moved the people to tears. The crowds welcomed such men with great joy. Riots broke out. Surplices, altars and Prayer Books were destroyed. The Puritans rushed into print to so great an extent, there was 'a veritable explosion of long-stifled convictions and suppressed opinions'.

But those staunchly held opinions were hopelessly divided. On the one hand, the Root and Branch Petition – designed to abolish Episcopacy – was signed by fifteen thousand Londoners. It was presented to Parliament on the 11th of December, 1640, and its message was clear enough. No more bishops! Yet at the other extreme, Laud having done his work so 'thoroughly', counter-petitions actually demanded the absolute retention of bishops, otherwise there would be 'no Church, no ordinations, no [Lord's] supper', they said. And in between, seven hundred ministers wanted Episcopacy retained, but somewhat reformed. Parliament's response to these contradictory demands was to fudge. They agreed to tolerate Episcopacy. But there were warning signs of trouble to come; a number of MPs belonged to the Root and Branch party – including the Puritan member for Cambridge, one Oliver Cromwell.

With the establishment of the Long Parliament, Puritanism now began to flourish, and many Nonconformists gladly returned from exile. Independents, Congregationalists, Baptists and the rest grasped the opportunity which presented itself, so that 'no fewer than fourscore congregations of separate churches' were set up in London and its surroundings. The bishops might sneer that these churches were 'instructed by guides fit for them, cobblers, tailors, felt-makers, and such-like trash' but the fact is, as Puritanism was beginning to hold the high ground in

England, so the Separatists took full advantage of the breathing space this afforded them. But they had need to be quick – before the powerful machinery of State-Puritanism was set in place. Once that happened, the all-dominant Puritans would then try to crush the life out of them. Where Charles and Laud had failed, they would do their utmost to put a stop to Nonconformity.

Even so, the real – and unanswerable – religious question for the Long Parliament was: Exactly what sort of Puritanism was State-Puritanism to be? Many exiles returning from New England were Independents or Congregationalists who, along with Baptists, all went into print against Presbyterianism; and did so as resolutely as against Episcopacy. John Lilburne wrote a book against his former master, the Presbyterian William Prynne. It was significantly entitled *Come out of Her, my people – A Just Apology for the Way of Total Separation*. Things were altogether in the melting-pot; and the fire underneath was getting very warm. The pace of change is illustrated by the experience of John Milton who, in 1641, published three pamphlets opposing Episcopacy, pamphlets which were pro-Presbyterian. But a year later, he had changed his mind. He published another volume *The Reason of Church Government* in which he was moving towards Independency. The earth was shaking! In the face of all the ferment, Parliament decided to call an Assembly at Westminster to try to bring some sort of order and uniformity to religion, and thus prevent utter chaos. The State Church question had to be settled once and for all. In 1642, a letter was sent even to America to ask representatives to attend the Assembly. It was signed by Oliver Cromwell, among others.

Nevertheless, the government of the Church was not going to be an easy matter to settle, to put it mildly. Parliament was fully united in only one cause in religion. It was anti-Popery. It had only one policy, which was intolerance. The Puritan Parliament was thoroughly fed-up with Separatists of all kinds, and wanted a uniform State Church. Reader, we have seen this storm brewing up several times during the course of the previous eighty years. The black clouds had been lowering. Now the thunder claps were to roll. Yet the great question remained as intractable as ever. What sort of National Church would it be? Which form would it take? If the majority in Parliament got its way there is little doubt what would happen. It has been said, though it may be an exaggeration, that ‘out of some two hundred members, about one hundred and fifty were Presbyterians’. But many outside Parliament wanted something other than Presbyterianism. Something very ‘other’!

If that was not enough, the peaceful and orderly settlement of the State itself also presented enormous difficulties. Fear of Popery was everywhere, and with good reason, since the queen continued aggressive in her

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Romanism, even flaunting it. Charles was playing his usual game, speaking fine words to Parliament, but all the while engaged in secret deals with foreign governments – even with the pope – to raise an army to wage war against his own subjects. He actually tried to treat with the Scots, making wild promises to appease their Presbyterianism, but lying at every turn, for underneath he remained firmly of his expressed opinion that ‘Presbyterianism is no religion for gentlemen’. In reality, he intended to bring back Laud’s uniformity in State and Church, even at this late stage, if only he could manage it. Though Parliament might want its own sort of uniformity, if the king could only scrape an army together he would show them! There was plenty of fight left in him – he even went to Parliament in person, storming in to arrest five of his leading opponents, but found that ‘the birds had flown’. Bitterly frustrated, the king arrogantly demanded to know where they were. Speaker William Lenthall bravely and stoutly replied in momentous words of defiance, words which resonate to this day:

May it please your Majesty, I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak in this place but as the House is pleased to direct me, whose servant I am here.

The king left the House empty-handed, then quitted London. Now the die was cast. Within a few months, Charles had sent Henrietta to France with their children and the Crown Jewels, while he had travelled north to Nottingham. On the 22nd of August, 1642, he took the fateful step; he unfurled his standard to wage war on Parliament. The First Civil War had begun. The next time the king would enter the City of London would be to answer to the nation he had so grievously mis-ruled, and to face execution. In Whitehall on a frosty morning, the 30th of January, 1649, Charles Stuart’s head would be severed from his body by a blow from the executioner’s axe. In the meantime, much blood would flow as the nation divided and began to tear itself apart. The English Revolution had begun.

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Reader, very serious thought must be given to all of this. It is far more than a mere collection of interesting historical facts. Lessons have to be learned; but not, in these pages, political or military lessons. As we have thus far throughout the book, we must draw *spiritual* conclusions from this sad chapter in the history of England, and trace particularly its effect on the church. What is more – if I read the times aright – these lessons are desperately needed at the present time, especially among evangelicals; perhaps, above all, among Reformed Christians.

Before we can do this, however, we must go back a few years in order to follow yet one more development in the battle to recover the church –

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the spiritual battle, that is, the battle which took place within the churches themselves. That is where the real struggle was carried on, not in the wrangles of the Parliamentary debates, nor in men's resolve to shed blood on killing grounds in the fields of England and Scotland. The Civil Wars were a terrible disaster, and not only because of the dreadful cost in human life, but for the moment I leave those wars to look at something which was of far greater consequence in the struggle to recover the New Testament pattern of the churches. You see, reader, in following the history of the reign of Charles I, we have left some very important developments behind – advances which were made in and through the Independent church formed by Henry Jacob in Southwark. We must now retrace our steps and take up the history of that church once again. We shall see that wonderful gains were made through the Southwark church itself, and through those churches which came from it. As we now examine those gains, we must keep in mind that they came about during the horrific reign of Charles and Laud. The glorious work which sprang out of the Southwark Independent church did not take place in days of ease, when true believers were popular, and the gospel was readily accepted by the people. Far from it. The conditions were exactly those we have seen throughout this chapter. Persecution was rife. Prison, suffering, loss and shame were the lot of those who defied King Charles to obey the Lord Christ. If the times were ominous, the happenings in the Southwark church were momentous. And it is because the background was so dark that the events we now look at shine so brightly.

## *The Opening of the Floodgates*

We give thanks to God always for you... knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance... you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all... who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth... in every place

1 Thessalonians 1:2-8

*From Independency to Anabaptism – the Independent church develops into Particular Baptist churches by friendly discussions and divisions – Lathrop – Dupper – Eaton – Jessey – Blunt – baptism by immersion – how to go back to the New Testament – spiritual love and unity among the churches – Spilsbury – Kiffin – Knollys – Presbyterians in power – persecution of the Baptists – Featley – the 1644 Confession – ridiculous arguments against Baptists – State-Presbyterianism proposes stern measures against them – the end of Presbyterian power – the fall of the Puritans – lessons for today*

The Independent church which was formed in 1616 at Southwark, with Henry Jacob as its first pastor, prospered to such an extent that several churches were formed out of it. But the churches which arose, or were formed out of *those* churches, were not all of an Independent persuasion. Far from it. In fact, five out of the six churches which sprang directly from the Southwark church adopted Baptist principles. What is more, the original church itself became a Baptist church in 1645. Now, strange as it may seem, this development from Independency into Baptist churches should really cause little or no surprise. The contemporary critics of the Nonconformists argued that the only logical outcome of both Separatism and Independency was the Baptist position, which those fault-finders derided by the abusive term ‘Anabaptist’. As one put it:

The tendency of Independency, does... of course breed Anabaptism... if they judge Anabaptism a pestilent error... they should renounce their Independency, which is so natural an occasion of it... The reason is plain, because no man can be true to the principles of Independents and Brownists, but they must turn Anabaptists.

A certain Mr Pagit who wrote a book entitled *Arrow against Separation* claimed – deplored – that many of the members of the Ancient Separatist church, among whom Johnson and Ainsworth had ministered, had ‘turned Anabaptists... So also has it fallen out in England; the church that came

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from Holland, many of the members fell to Anabaptism, both of Shadrack Sympson's and Thomas Goodwin's, and some separated into distinct congregations'.

That is how the contemporary critics of the Nonconformist churches saw things. But leaving aside – or even discounting – those testimonies, the truth is, Independency did lead directly to the formation of the Particular (Calvinistic) Baptist churches by means of developments within the first Independent church which was formed at Southwark in 1616. It is very important to realise that this line of Baptist churches was totally distinct from that which came from the church formed by John Smyth in Amsterdam in 1609, and which was brought into England in 1611-1612 by Thomas Helwys. That church, as we have seen, was a General (Arminian) Baptist church. It held that Christ died for all sinners in general, whereas the Calvinistic Baptist churches asserted that Christ died to redeem the elect only. The General Baptists believed in – and, if consistent, still do believe in – a general or universal redemption; the Particular Baptists believed in – and, if consistent, still do believe in – a particular or limited atonement. Just to say, the General Baptist churches of today come from a different line to the church started by Smyth. Those early General Baptist churches died out in the 18th century.

It is the development which came about among the Independents, and led to the formation of Particular Baptist churches, churches that were radically Separatist in outlook, which I will trace in this chapter. One God-honouring feature of this growth was the charitable way in which it all came about. There was no rancour within the Independent and Baptist churches which were formed, but all the changes took place in a loving, gracious manner, and friendly relations were kept up between the various churches as they came into existence and expanded. This is a very striking testimony, reader, and it serves as a pointed application to us. It is to be hoped that our churches can grow and develop in a spiritual way, that other churches can be formed, with a warm brotherly attitude being maintained through it all – if and when God should prosper us. The same applies if we should find our views changing to the degree that new churches need to be established.

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In 1622, Henry Jacob resigned as the pastor of the Independent church, whereupon it appointed John Lathrop to the position in 1624. A courageous and meek man, Lathrop was formerly 'a preacher in Kent', a curate of the Church of England who had come to adopt Independent principles, and in this way became the pastor of the Southwark church. Under the tyrannical persecution of the times, Lathrop and thirty other

members of the church decided to emigrate to New England, and did so in 1634. But before that date, some very important decisions were taken by the church – decisions which would have a massive influence for good upon the battle to get right back to the New Testament pattern and order.

The question of baptism was raised very early in the life of the church, and the ordinance became the subject of much discussion among the members. These exchanges took place in a time of spiritual prosperity for them, in spite of – or because of – the bitter persecution meted out by the authorities. We looked into that onslaught in the previous chapter. In those dark days, the church was greatly blessed of God; indeed, it grew so rapidly that by 1633 ‘the church, considering that they were now grown very numerous, and so more than could in these times of persecution conveniently meet together...’, thought much about the best way to deal with their increased numbers. Therefore, in the face of harsh opposition and determined persecution, two vital factors came together in the Southwark church in the early 1630s – increased numbers and discussion about baptism. These two factors would prove highly significant.

Here is another challenge to us. The Southwark church was persecuted but it grew in numbers; and not only in numbers; it grew spiritually. Evidence for this can be seen in the way the members were prepared to talk about spiritual matters, probe the Scriptures to discover the mind of God, and handle it all in a most loving manner among themselves. Persecution did not make them think in terms of survival only; they wanted to expand and develop. They did not allow Laud and his cronies to fix the agenda for the church, but they desired to know more of the will of God in all matters, including church order and practice. They did not think they had reached an end of reformation, with nothing more to do. Their minds were not closed. They possessed the Berean spirit, for ‘they searched the Scriptures... to find out whether these things were so’ (Acts 17:11). They did not make the mistake of thinking that just because plenty of people were attending their services it meant that they had everything right in the church. Numbers were not their touchstone!

Reader, would you have fitted in to that kind of church life? Would you have welcomed it? Or would the fear of persecution have kept you away? Would you have played safe? Would you have looked for an easier route, advised the church ‘to adopt a low profile’ and thus avoid trouble? And if you had been there, would you have had anything to say in the spiritual conversations? Or would you have had no contribution to make?

And, once again, why the past tense in all these questions? What about your church life at the moment? Do you engage in spiritual conversation among yourselves? Is your church seeking to know more of the mind of God revealed in Scripture? Are you looking for it? Are you Reformed and

still reforming? It is very easy to think we have reached the limit of reform when we have made a little progress. Let us catch the spirit of the word of God to the aged Joshua: ‘There remains very much land yet to be possessed’ (Josh. 13:1). Likewise that of John Robinson in his final sermon:

The Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy word... But take heed what you receive for truth – examine it well and compare it and weigh it with other Scriptures of truth before you receive it. It is not possible that... perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.

It is a constant temptation – in our private lives, in our families and in our churches – to opt for the easy life and let spiritual things drift; but it is wrong. We know what God thinks of those who do discuss his truth and who seek to walk in his way, governed by godly fear. Of them it is recorded:

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on his name. ‘They shall be mine’, says the LORD of hosts... Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him (Mal. 3:16-18).

The Southwark Independent church members were certainly included in that commendation. May we be among the number also.

There is, of course, another side to this coin. We are warned that some men will have itching ears and will indulge their insatiable lust for something new to ‘turn their ears away from the truth’ and ‘be turned aside to fables’ (2 Tim. 4:3-4). There is such a thing as a love of the sensational, the love of novelty (Acts 17:21), and I am not appealing for that spirit in the churches. Certainly not, no, not for a minute. The motive behind that is a desire for excitement, not a determination to submit to God in Scripture. Obedience to the word of God is not the aim in those circumstances. But obedience was the aspiration of the members of the Independent church at Southwark. Reader, be warned, change for change’s sake is a drug, a drug which many Christians are hooked on; they are addicted to the love of the sensational and the new. Calvin, it will be remembered, in his last address warned against the love of novelty, an ever-present danger to the churches. Allied to this is the tendency, which is altogether too easy, to pluck a text out of its biblical setting and cry ‘eureka’, but before we think we have discovered something which seems to have eluded nearly everybody else, to say the least we ought to be cautious and careful.

Further, the subtle danger of copy-cat religion is ever with us, especially since in these days we find out so quickly what novelties are

being dreamed up in churches thousands of miles away. These details can be beamed into our living rooms, along with all the other nonsense of the age which some professing Christians seem happy to listen to. Toronto today; Little-Snoring-by-the-Sea tomorrow.<sup>1</sup> Imitation of others is a disease, a highly-infectious disease at that. We must avoid a love of novelty; rather we must test all things by Scripture (Acts 17:11). While it is blameworthy never to explore the word to reform ourselves – we would be guilty of conceit and it would lead to stagnation – it is no use avoiding one error by falling into another. The Southwark church showed the right spirit; too many churches today show the wrong spirit in this area.

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As a result of all the discussions, and as early as 1630, a certain Mr Dupper and others seceded from the church on the grounds that they did not now believe that the Church of England baptism they had received as infants was valid. It was not that they disagreed with infant baptism itself; it was the baptism of the State Church which was objectionable. The truth is, they had come to regard the Church of England as an apostate church. In other words, they were moving away from Independency towards Separatism. It will be remembered that the Independents and the Separatists were very similar in their thinking. The main difference between them was that the Independents regarded the Church of England as a true church, and they were willing to have fellowship with it, whereas the Separatists looked upon the Church of England as apostate and not a true church. The difference of view was even more basic in that the Separatists rejected all notion of a State Church in any case.

Consequently, in 1630 this Mr Dupper and his friends seceded from the Independent church because they had now become Separatists. That was the honourable thing to do. Sadly, it has not always been the course which has been adopted by those who change their view on the order or doctrinal position of the church. In our own time, not a few seem able to be members of a church despite their disagreement with its stance on doctrine or practice. Obviously common-sense must be used, but it is dishonourable for men to remain in membership where they can no longer honestly accept the basis of the church. I realise that some Christians applaud the spirit of broad-mindedness which this is supposed to reflect, but I beg to differ.

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<sup>1</sup> On re-reading for this edition, I can only remark how things have moved – downhill – since I wrote it! ‘Toronto blessing’, which started at the Toronto Airport Vineyard church in 1994, involves the so-called manifestation of the Spirit by laughter, shaking, crying, being cleansed by heaving (as in vomiting), making animal noises, and so on.

A little while after the first secession, in 1633, to be precise, one by the name of Samuel Eaton, a button-maker, along with Mark Lucar, Thomas Skippard, and various others, came to adopt a view similar to Mr Dupper; they now looked upon their State Church baptism as invalid. They also took the honourable course, and they asked the church to dismiss them because they did not wish to harm it, seeing their views had altered and were now different to the majority. They said ‘the church being now become so large that it might be prejudicial, [they] desired dismissal’. This was duly granted by the members, all with a friendly spirit, on the 12th of September, 1633, in order that the minority might form a new church, ‘an entire church, and further the communion of those churches in order among themselves’. After which, ‘Mr Eaton with some others receiving a further baptism, others joined... them’.

We must pause for a moment or two. That last statement is most interesting, but it is somewhat tantalising, for it is not certain what was meant by this reference to ‘a further baptism’. They were baptised again – that much is clear. But *why* were they baptised again? This is the teasing question. Was it simply a baptism to replace their invalid Church of England baptism, the same as Mr Dupper and his friends? Or had they actually come to reject the whole notion of infant baptism? In which case, were they now baptised as believers, and only because they were believers? That is, were they now baptised on that basis? If so, the 12th of September, 1633, marks the formation of the first Particular Baptist church. But if they were baptised again simply because they did not now regard their State Church baptism as valid, then the church they formed in 1633 was a Separatist church practising infant baptism, and not a Baptist church. In my opinion, the probability is – and see below for further discussion – the 1633 church was *not* a Baptist church. However, the new church, of whatever persuasion it was, prospered, and others joined it – including a man by the name of Richard Blunt, of whom we shall hear more.

The original church also continued to prosper under the hand of God, and in 1637 it appointed Henry Jessey as its pastor, seeing Lathrop had emigrated, as noted earlier. Jessey was a Yorkshire man, the son of a Church of England minister. He had been educated at Cambridge, following which he had become a Church of England minister himself, but in the course of time he had been deprived for his nonconformity. In other words, he had become a Puritan. But by 1637, at the latest, he had become an Independent.

In 1638, a further development took place within the original church when another peaceable withdrawal occurred, and as a result we can be definite and say that a Particular Baptist church was formed on this

occasion. Thus, depending on the points noted earlier, the 1638 church was the first Particular Baptist church. This is the case if, as seems very likely to me at least, the church formed by Samuel Eaton and others in 1633 continued to practice infant baptism. The difficulty, the lack of precision over the exact detail and order of events, arises because there are two main manuscript sources besides a third manuscript which is a confused compilation of the other two. This is unfortunate.

However, it is known that in 1638 six members of the original church came to the view that their baptism was invalid, but this time not merely because they had been baptised in the Church of England. No, they became ‘convinced that baptism was not for infants but professed believers’ only. Some of the confusion arises at this very point because one manuscript says that these six were ‘of the same judgement as Sam. Eaton’. Does this mean that Samuel Eaton did hold to believer’s baptism in 1633? Probably not. My own view is that the six were of the same mind as Samuel Eaton *in that they asked the original church for a friendly dismission*. I do not think they had the same view of baptism as Eaton. The manuscript appears to bear this out when it says, ‘these also being of the same judgement with Sam. Eaton, and desiring to depart and not to be censured...’. It seems most likely therefore that Samuel Eaton did not hold to believer’s baptism in 1633, and the church which was formed at that time retained infant baptism. Thus the church which was formed in 1638 was the first Particular Baptist church.

But whatever the truth of the matter, the Southwark church agreed to this request by the six for a ‘friendly dismission’ without censure on the 8th of June, 1638. They recorded that ‘our interest in them was remitted with prayer made in their behalf’. A new church was thereby formed, a Particular Baptist church with John Spilsbury, a cobbler by trade, as its pastor.

To summarise this point: In the light of the manuscript difficulties it is not possible to be absolutely precise about everything which happened. Did Spilsbury come up through the church formed in 1633 with Eaton as pastor? How many Particular Baptist churches existed in 1638? All that can be stated with certainty is:

In 1638, there was either the first Calvinistic Baptist church, with John Spilsbury as its pastor, containing Samuel Eaton, Mark Lucar, and others, or... in the same year there were two Calvinistic Baptist churches in London, the one under John Spilsbury and the other under Samuel Eaton.

In 1638, another six members were dismissed from the original church, again with no suggestion of ill-will, to join the church where Spilsbury was pastor. Clearly, these six had come to the same view as Spilsbury and the others on believer’s baptism. In 1639, Samuel Eaton died. But the

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Particular Baptist church grew rapidly and it, too, divided amicably because of the increase in its numbers. One of the churches thus formed appointed a man by the name of William Kiffin as pastor who – about 1641 – had become a Baptist. First, he had joined the original Independent church in 1638, then he had adopted Baptist principles and moved to the church under Spilsbury. A little later, Kiffin was instrumental in another cordial separation to form the Devonshire Square church, which appointed him to be its pastor. As such, he was to play a leading role – if not the leading role – in the development of the Particular Baptist churches for several years to come.

All the time this church-forming was going on, the Independent, Separatist and Baptist churches continued to face great persecution under Laud. The church with Kiffin as pastor, for example, would meet early in the morning and late at night, to avoid attack and disturbance. Even so, they still met with much difficulty, and worse, from louts who hurled stones, from seizure by magistrates, besides many other troubles and hindrances. Kiffin himself was hauled before the assizes, from where he was sent to gaol as a ‘prisoner of Jesus Christ’.

In spite of the persecution, the Particular Baptist churches continued to examine their practices in the light of the New Testament. They now began to ask other questions. What about the mode of baptism? They had settled the question: Who should be baptised? Now it was to be: How should they be baptised? A further question they pondered over was: Who should administer the ordinance?

Richard Blunt, who, as mentioned above, belonged to the church in which Samuel Eaton had been pastor, separated from it in a friendly way on the 18th of May, 1640, along with some others, to form a further church. About a year later, this latter church came to the view that baptism ‘ought to be by dipping the body into water, resembling burial and rising again’, according to Scripture. Up to this time, affusion (pouring) had been the mode, but Blunt and the others came to the conviction that this was wrong; it ought to be by immersion, he declared. However, there was no one in England that Blunt knew of who baptised in this way, ‘none having themselves so practiced in England to professed believers’. It was true that the Church of England rubrics did allow baptism by immersion, but that was for the baptism of infants. Blunt and his friends could think of nobody in England who could baptise them by immersion ‘because though some in this nation rejected the baptism of infants, yet they had not, as they knew of, revived the ancient custom of immersion’. Accordingly, in 1641, Blunt went over to Holland, where he was baptised by immersion in a church which belonged to an off-shoot of the Mennonites; they had begun to immerse in 1620. On his return to London in January, 1642, Blunt baptised

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Mr Blacklock, the teacher of the church, and then the pair of them baptised fifty-one others.

It is not difficult to imagine the public contempt and ridicule which they received for this further baptism. Praise-God Barbon (or Barebone), a member of church led by Jessey, but an infant baptiser who approved of Church of England baptism, and therefore certainly was no admirer of the Baptist position, preached a sermon in April, 1642, in which he ‘greeted’ the various changes with what seems very much like sarcasm. Barbon said:

The way of new baptising, lately begun to be practiced... some... having found out a new defect in the baptism... so addressing themselves to be baptised the third time after the true way and manner they have found out, which they account a precious truth. The particular of their opinion and practice is to dip.

Reader, what do you think of all the changes which these Independents, then Particular Baptists, went through? Do you smile at them? Do you think they were unstable believers? The truth is, what they were doing was most commendable. They were searching the New Testament, and always reforming their churches, proving that their minds were not closed to the truth. Praise-God Barbon might poke fun at them, but, in fact, they demonstrated a most wonderful spirit. As I said a few moments ago, they believed, as John Robinson had maintained some twenty years before, that God had more light to break out of his word. These Baptists were looking for that light, and as they saw their way made plain to them from Scripture, so they followed, whatever the cost. And it was very costly to be a Baptist in the 1640s in England and elsewhere, for it was not only Laud who had his hand against them, nor were they persecuted only in England. The Puritans of New England – a land where Puritans enjoyed the political mastery – certainly persecuted the Baptists very severely. The Puritans had little or no time for them in Old England, either. More on this later.

What of this baptism by immersion? Can it be justified – by Scripture, I mean? The answer is plain. Most definitely it can be established from the New Testament. What is more, no other form of baptism can be found in the New Testament. This is admitted even by many who themselves baptise infants and baptise them by sprinkling. I have fully worked out my arguments in my *Infant Baptism Tested* – which see.

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To continue with the history: Blunt’s action in going to Holland in order to be immersed by a person who had himself been immersed, raised the old question of succession again – this time among the Particular Baptists. It was the very same question as that raised by the General Baptist, Thomas

Helwys, over the action of John Smyth in his approach to the Waterlanders, thirty years before. As Helwys had disagreed with Smyth, so Spilsbury and others rejected the thinking behind Blunt's actions. Granted that the New Testament practice of the immersion of believers had been virtually, if not entirely, lost for fifteen hundred years, how could it be restored? Spilsbury and others maintained that 'baptisedness is not essential to the administrator'. That is, since the practice of baptising believers by immersion had been lost, it was not essential – maybe not even possible – to find a man to baptise believers *who himself had been baptised by immersion*. But that did not mean that nothing could be done to get back to the apostolic order. The ordinance could still be recovered and the New Testament practice could be restored, for 'they affirmed and practiced accordingly, that after a general corruption of baptism, an unbaptised person might warrantably baptise, and so begin a reformation'. Just because no one had baptised by immersion for centuries, or no one as far as they knew, it did not mean that they were unable to start all over again.

This must be right, and on two grounds. *First*, the notion that the truth, whether of doctrine or practice, comes down the centuries through some kind of 'apostolic succession', is not warranted by the New Testament. Frankly, this view is papistical. The truth is not handed on by human contact. The point which must be grasped is that it is our obedience to the apostolic practice, doctrine and order, which counts. It is not necessary – it is impossible, anyway – to trace a so-called line of human descent from the apostles. The important thing is to hold fast to the pattern of sound words which the apostles gave us, to keep that good thing committed to us (2 Tim. 1:13-14; 3:10). That is how we must conduct ourselves in the church (1 Tim. 3:15). We must follow the apostles and Christ in our practices (1 Thess. 1:6). Our task is to imitate the churches of the New Testament (1 Thess. 2:14). This is the real and only succession. This is what matters, not some pretended human contact with the apostles. *Secondly*, if some aspect of church life is entirely lost through a great apostasy, say, then if 'apostolic succession' is essential to a true recovery of that aspect of church life, it can never be recovered, can it? If there is no one on earth who has ever experienced the apostolic practice in that aspect of church life, it cannot be handed on. In short, it can never be restored to the church. This kind of argument must be nonsense. We must start from where we are, not from where we would like to be.

I admit these questions may seem rather arid and academic at the moment. However, if we pass through a general apostasy in years to come, then such issues may well become relevant to the actual experience of Christians in the future. They will need to face up to them. Similar

questions might arise in a much more localised sense as well. How can we reform our own particular church, for example? How do we go about it? Do we have to call in an outside body to do it for us, to legalise it in some way, to give it a stamp of approval? You will recall just how valiantly the early Nonconformists of various persuasions fought to establish the principle that each church is a complete church, entirely equipped to order itself and reform itself according to the New Testament. These are vital points.

While all these discussions and friendly divisions were taking place within the churches, the original Independent church with Jessey as pastor also began to examine the subject of believer's baptism. This came about because one of its members, Hanserd Knollys, felt scruples over baptising his child. So much so, he put the question to the church 'that they might satisfy him, or he rectify them, if amiss herein; which was well accepted'. The church met several times to deal with the issue, and each discussion was 'performed with prayer and in much love, as Christian meetings'. The outcome was that Knollys presented sufficient arguments to the church as to carry 'quite a considerable number' of members with him. Some of these now separated from the original church to join the church with William Kiffin. The rest were dismissed in 1645 to form another church, with Knollys as pastor.

It is delightful to be able to record that these churches felt much love among themselves, and maintained mutual respect for each other in their different views and practices. In particular, the original church accepted all these divisions with a very gracious spirit. They looked upon their former members with fond remembrance, saying that they did 'count them still of our church; and pray and love them [and] desire conversing together as far as their principles permit them'. That same year 'Jessey himself was convinced also... and was baptised by Mr Knollys, and then by degrees he baptised many of the church, when convinced they desired it'. Thus the original Independent church became a Particular Baptist church during the 1640s.

These Independents and Baptists saw the doctrine of the church a great deal clearer than many do today. For instance, they did not talk about 'resigning from a church', as though they could walk away from their vows and commitments just when the fancy took them. Oh no! They asked the church to consider their case and to dismiss them in a friendly way if they could not satisfy their conscience. They wanted to be dismissed by the church; they did not think in terms of resignation of membership. This is important. Too often today, Christians think they are above the church, that they can join and quit the church according to their whims and fancies. They are grossly mistaken. There are only two ways – apart from death –

in which the bond between a church and a member can be severed, and both involve dismissal. The member must be dismissed – either in a friendly way or by reason of discipline by the church. Anything less than this falls short of New Testament principles.<sup>2</sup>

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What do we know of these Baptists? Who were they? What did they believe and practice in addition to believer's baptism?

John Spilsbury was a convinced Calvinist, as he made clear in the sub-title of one of his books, written to prove 'that Christ has not presented to his Father's justice a satisfaction for the sins of all men; but only for the sins of them that do or shall believe in him, which are his elect only'.<sup>3</sup> Spilsbury also played a large part in the publication of the faith of the Particular Baptists; he was recognised as the 'great patriarch of the Anabaptist Confession' of 1644. I will have more to say on this in a little while. Henry Cromwell, fourth son of Oliver, thought sufficiently highly of Spilsbury's abilities to ask him to go to Ireland in 1656, but Spilsbury refused on the grounds that he had just been appointed as pastor among 'a very great people'; he was on the point of leaving the original Particular Baptist church to move to the one at Wapping.

William Kiffin, who lost both parents in the plague when only a boy, started work in 'a very mean calling'. While still in his youth he attended the ministry of various Puritan and Independent ministers. It was through this kind of preaching, as a 'boy, about fifteen years old, feeling himself a sinner, and attending diligently to the most powerful preaching he could find', he looked to discover the way of peace with God. This reminds us of what we found in the life of the young William Bradford, thirty years before, and it must stir our hearts and warm them, surely? The evidences of spirituality in the lives of young people four centuries ago rebukes our generation, but what an encouragement it is to all those who are trying to train up their children in the fear of God. How heartening to those today who seek to preach powerfully and faithfully to all their hearers, including children.

One of 'the most powerful' ministers the young Kiffin heard 'was very fervent and even vehement in his preaching'. By this, he showed Kiffin

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<sup>2</sup> Sadly, if a church cannot or will not see the point, the member has to take the law into his own hand and act on his own initiative.

<sup>3</sup> This, I take to mean, that Christ died for the elect – for those whom God had chosen and determined to bring to faith. Not that Christ died for those whom God had foreseen would independently believe.

‘the wonderful efficacy of the blood of Christ both to pardon and cleanse from sin, and answered many objections which an unbelieving heart would raise against the full satisfaction which Christ made for sinners’. A little later, Kiffin heard the preaching of another minister, one renowned for his prayers, and this man was used of God to bring the youth into saving faith, showing him ‘that Jesus Christ was mightily accomplished with power and ability to save his people’. Kiffin recorded that ‘my faith was exceedingly strengthened in the fullness of that satisfaction which Jesus Christ had given to the Father for poor sinners, and was enabled to believe my interest therein’.

Some time between 1638 and 1641, as we have seen, Kiffin became convinced of Baptist principles, and joined the Particular Baptist church where Spilsbury was pastor. In 1644, he became a pastor himself – with Thomas Patient – in the Devonshire Square Particular Baptist church. He continued in that work for sixty years, supporting himself as a woollen-merchant, even becoming one of the wealthiest men in London. His influence over the later development of the Particular Baptists was enormous.

Hanserd Knollys was a Cambridge graduate who became, first, an Anglican minister, then a Puritan, then a Separatist preacher. Because of Laud’s persecution, Knollys emigrated to New England in 1638, but by 1641 he was back in London, and a member of the original Independent church at Southwark, where Jessey was pastor. Knollys was a robust advocate of toleration, but having met with precious little of it in Puritan New England, he came back to London saying that he ‘might as well be knocked about in Old England’. As explained above, in 1645, Knollys was amicably dismissed from the Southwark church to form a Particular Baptist church, in which he was appointed pastor. He maintained himself by opening a school and by working in the woollen trade, but he continued his ministry until in his ninety-third year. He wrote much, publishing grammars in Greek, Hebrew and Latin, besides an exposition of the Revelation. Prophetic questions, however, proved too fascinating for the man, and were his undoing in that he let them grievously affect his ministry.

Such misapplication of Scripture had very serious consequences during the turmoils of the Civil Wars and the turbulent years which followed, when politics coloured by prophetic speculations badly damaged the profession of the gospel for many. Knollys was not alone. Far from it. Nearly 75% of the writings of Presbyterians and Independents during the years 1640-1653 contained millenarian views and hopes; some of these were staggering, even fantastic and dangerous. Baptists and Quakers were also caught up in it. Indeed, few escaped its lure! Baillie was alarmed,

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complaining that most of the leading preachers of London were open advocates of the reign of the saints, a godly dictatorship in England. Many Puritans and others thought the time had come for a literal, military war with Antichrist, to whom kings had given up their kingdoms. This included, of course, King Charles.

However, none of this excuses Knollys, but it puts his failure into perspective.

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As we have seen, the Puritans were in the ascendancy during the 1640s. They had at last got their hands on political power, and, being convinced of Constantine principles, they were determined to make the utmost use of it. They were greatly disturbed by the rapid growth of the Baptists; indeed, they hated them and poured much abuse upon them. Naturally, they included no Baptists in their Assembly which met at Westminster from 1643, called to determine a uniform religion. On the contrary, the Puritans were severely intolerant of the very existence of Baptists, and did all they could to get rid of them and their ‘pestilential’ doctrines, as they labelled them. Some Lancashire Presbyterian ministers, for instance, spoke stoutly against the continued existence of Baptists. They ought not to be tolerated! These Presbyterian ministers declared that their ‘toleration would be putting a sword into a madman’s hands; a cup of poison into the hand of a child; a letting loose madmen with firebrands in their hands... a laying a stumbling block before the blind; a proclaiming liberty to the wolves to come into Christ’s fold to prey upon the lambs’. Even as gracious and godly a man as Samuel Rutherford could bring himself to say that he ‘denied absolutely the moral principles underlying religious toleration... There is but one true Church and all who are outside it are heretics who must be destroyed’, he declared. Baptists, apparently were heretics, beyond salvation and ought to be destroyed!

Richard Baxter – yes, even the moderate Baxter – said: ‘I abhor unlimited liberty and toleration of all’, calling such magnanimity ‘wickedness’. He made wild and stupid accusations against the Baptists, even going as far as to say they baptised naked. He actually soiled his lips with an ugly rumour, making a false reference to a minister who, he argued, since he ‘could baptise naked all the maids in Bewdley, and think it no immodesty, he has lost his common ingenuity and modesty with the truth’. This was a lie. If the premise had been correct, the conclusion would have been likewise, but when men, even good men, have to resort to this kind of nonsense and lies to defend their case, something must be amiss. Is this what the doctrine of Constantine leads to? Is this where intolerance

ends up? It surely does not need to be said that the Baptists took great care to ensure modesty and propriety in the administration of the ordinance of Christ! They drew special attention to this very point in their statements concerning their practice.

A certain Dr Featley engaged in public debate with Kiffin and three other Particular Baptists on the 17th of October, 1642. He later published his account in *The Dippers Dipped, or the Anabaptists ducked and plunged over head and ears at a disputation in Southwark*. Featley certainly dipped his pen in vitriol as much as in ink. His book displayed all the intolerance which was a mark of State-Presbyterianism. He charged his opponents with being ‘illiterate... lying and blasphemous... impure and carnal... cruel... profane’. He wanted them destroyed, not only by argument but by banishment and the sword. He went on:

Of all heretics and schismatics, the Anabaptists ought to be most carefully looked unto and severely punished, if not utterly exterminated and banished out of the Church and kingdom... They preach, and print, and practice their heretical impieties openly; they hold their conventicles weekly in our chief cities and suburbs thereof, and there [preach] by turns... They flock in great multitudes to their Jordans, and both sexes enter into the river, and are dipped after their manner with a kind of spell, containing the heads of their erroneous tenets... And as they defile our rivers with their impure washings, and our pulpits with their false prophecies and fanatical enthusiasms, so the presses sweat and groan under the load of their blasphemies.

Whatever else may be deduced from Featley’s account, it is clear that the Baptist cause advanced rapidly in the 1640s. He himself spoke of ‘great multitudes’ flocking to join them, of their weekly services in many places, and of their efforts to publish a true account of their practices – even by the early 1640s. Further, if he felt the need to write with such venom, even that Baptists ought to be ‘utterly exterminated and banished’ – for baptising believers by immersion, mark you! – then perhaps a fair-minded observer might think the worthy Doctor protested too much. Where did he discover Baptists using ‘a kind of spell’ or incantation? Could he prove that which his sly hints amounted to? Were the Baptists dabblers with the occult? Of course not! The idea was preposterous. Perhaps what the Presbyterian could not gain by argument he tried to obtain by malice. It was rather like the insecure preacher’s notes, ‘argument weak here – shout!’

In 1644, seven Particular Baptist churches of London replied to Dr Featley by the publication of a *Statement of the Faith of the Particular Baptists*. They showed they were fully alive to the stigma of Munster, being well aware that their enemies branded them with the evils committed by the fanatical fringe elements of the Anabaptists. They disowned the men of Munster and distanced themselves from them. The title read:

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The Confession of Faith of those churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists; presented to the view of all that fear God, to examine by the touchstone of the word of truth: as likewise for the taking off those aspersions which are frequently, both in pulpit and print (although unjustly) cast upon them.

They explained that they were not political revolutionaries, hence their disowning of the name Anabaptist; they did not hold to the views of the men of Munster, they abhorred that fiasco as much as any sane man did. Nor were they anti-magistrates. Of course, they allowed the magistrate no power in the rule of the church, but in civil matters they knew that they – as all men – were obliged to obey those in authority. They also claimed – and proved – that they were orthodox in their Calvinistic beliefs. Even in this they had been grossly maligned by their opponents, men who ought to have known better; by men who did know better! Putting it all together, the Particular Baptists boldly asserted that it was ‘notoriously untrue’ that they – ‘the poor despised churches of God in London’ – were guilty of:

Holding free-will, falling away from grace, denying original sin, disclaiming of magistracy, denying to assist them either in persons or purse in any of their lawful commands, doing acts unseemly in the dispensing of the ordinance of baptism, not to be named among Christians.

On the positive side, in addition to many other things they declared:

That Christ Jesus by his death did bring forth salvation and reconciliation only for the elect, which were those which God the Father gave him; and that the gospel which is to be preached to all men as the ground of faith, is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the ever-blessed God, filled with the perfection of all heavenly and spiritual excellencies, and that salvation is only and alone to be had through the believing in his name.

On baptism by immersion they asserted:

That baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed only upon persons professing faith, or that are disciples, or taught, who upon a profession of faith, ought to be baptised.

They were definite that ‘the way and manner of the dispensing of this ordinance the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water...’, but they stipulated that it had to be carried out ‘with convenient garments both upon the administrator and subject, with all modesty’. That ought to have been sufficient to put a stop to the unwarranted slur and abuse heaped upon them by men like Baxter, spoken about earlier.

On church order they were very clear. They believed in the gathered church principle; churches are independent and self-governing, they asserted. They agreed with Smyth, Helwys, Robinson, and Jacob, and all

like them in this regard, men whose views I have noted in earlier chapters. The Particular Baptists rejected the Presbyterian notion of synods, councils and higher ecclesiastical courts, with several congregations forming one church, yet they were careful to stress the need for mutual care and love between churches as far as it proves possible. They were independent but not isolationist in outlook. Nevertheless, true fellowship is only possible where churches are agreed on the gospel, and the pattern and ordinances of the church. And had they not proved that they knew what they were talking about? Think of the sweet demonstration of spiritual love which existed between the churches during their formative years when they came out of the Independent church in Southwark. That was real fellowship. Too often today fellowship between churches boils down to fellowship between ministers, or it is the artificial type which consists of little more than (dying) mutual support at ‘anniversaries’. On this issue of spiritual fellowship the Particular Baptists argued:

Although the particular congregations be distinct and separate bodies, every one a compact and knit city in itself; yet are they all to walk by one and the same rule, and by all means convenient to have the counsel and help one of another in all needful affairs of the church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head.

In conclusion they said:

We confess that we know but in part, and that we are ignorant of many things which we desire and seek to know: and if any shall do us that friendly part to show us, from the word of God, that [which] we see not, we shall have cause to be thankful to God and them. But if any man shall impose upon us anything that we see not to be commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ, we should in his strength, rather embrace all reproaches and tortures of men, to be stripped of all outward comforts, and if it were possible to die a thousand deaths, rather than do anything against the least tittle of the truth of God, or against the light of our own consciences.

The fifty-three Articles were signed in 1644 on behalf of the seven London churches by fifteen ministers, headed by William Kiffin. Two years later it was revised, when a French church came into the list, and it was then presented to Parliament. In this second edition, the commitment to baptism as a pre-requisite for taking the Lord’s supper was clearly stated; it had been only implied in the 1644 version. Several other editions of the Confession were called for over the years.

The Particular Baptists also had to face attacks on the other flank, when they debated with the General Baptists over the nature and extent of the atonement. For example, Kiffin and Patient held a public dispute with Edward Barber – an Arminian Baptist – in Kent in 1644.

After the fall of Laud, and as the months of State-Presbyterianism ground on, the hateful and despicable persecution of the Baptists continued without respite. The Puritans – who were political top-dogs now – made sure that Parliamentary Ordinances were passed against the Baptists, many of whom suffered grievously. They faced bitter, ill-informed and downright malicious criticism, even from great and godly men. Baxter, among others, accused them of attempting to murder by immersion! He said it was a flagrant transgression of the sixth commandment, being a practice which was likely to lead directly to murder by drowning, or at the very least by a fatal illness caught from the effects of immersion! This nonsense would have been bad enough if it had remained merely verbal but, sadly, the civil law came into play with an array of grisly punishments at its back. Those who believed in the power and right of the magistrate to enforce religious principles and laws, and to persecute all those who dared to dissent from the commonly-held ‘politically acceptable’ line, did not shirk from putting their ideas into full effect when they got the chance.

As just one example of Puritanical hatred, take the treatment meted out to a certain Samuel Oates, a Baptist minister of London, who went on a preaching tour in Essex in 1646. God blessed his labours; so much so, hundreds were converted and baptised. As it happened, but with not the slightest connection of course, one of the many converts died a few weeks later. For this, Mr Oates was ‘committed to prison, put in irons, and indicted for murder’! Oates was said to be responsible for her death! He had virtually killed the poor woman when he immersed her! However, the ridiculous case collapsed because credible testimony was given to the effect that ‘the young woman baptised was in good health for some time after her baptism’. Such absurd charges on the part of godly and intelligent men can hardly be credited. But ‘there are none so blind...’. Any stick would do to beat the heads of Baptists, it seems. Any pretence would do – even the most stupid and trumped-up charge.

In 1648, the largely Presbyterian Parliament showed an amazing degree of madness when it tried to enforce a Blasphemy Act against Baptists. Blasphemy? What for? Among other things, for speaking against infant baptism! Parliament imposed life imprisonment for any who taught ‘the vanity of infant baptism... unless they found two sufficient sureties that they would not publish or maintain their error any more’. Life imprisonment! To think – I, the author of this book, would get life imprisonment for writing as I have. I freely admit it may not be a very good book, it may deserve censure, it may not be worth the cost of the paper, it may be a waste of time... but the penalty the 1648 Presbyterian Parliament wanted to impose would seem a trifle on the severe side, would it not? Reader, leaving aside all light remarks – this is the mad outcome of

trying to enforce Christianity by the rule of law. I have spoken of it several times. If you are tempted to dabble with it, be warned. One day soon, you may be on the receiving end.

Just to illustrate the severity of the measure: By the 1648 Ordinance, Milton would have received five death sentences and eight life sentences for a book he wrote in the 1650s – if the Act had been law and he had published. Admittedly, the book was not entirely orthodox, but even so the Presbyterian determination to exterminate such works *and their authors* was excessive, to put it mildly. In the event, Milton’s appeal for free inquiry, open discussion and religious toleration went unheeded for many a long year – well beyond the era of State-Presbyterianism. In fact, his treatise would see public light of day only in 1825!

But, happy to record, by 1648, State-Presbyterianism was played out, and it was dying on its feet. The Blasphemy measure was but a last gasp. The Puritan Parliament might propose new laws of a draconian nature and draw up even sterner measures against dissent, yet its sun was setting. It did not know it, however, or would not recognise it, and like some beleaguered junta it went on devising frantic schemes to bolster its crumbling grip. Thus the Puritans continued to wield their diminishing political power from the chambers of Westminster, but before the year was out the Long Parliament and State-Presbyterianism were things of the past. The Particular Baptists, along with many others who were detested – even hated – by their political masters, had survived the onslaught. And they had done far more than merely survive. They had been born, they had grown and developed, and they were here to stay!

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Reader, you will have noticed that many of the early Baptist and other Nonconformist preachers were forced to support themselves by manual or other trades. For this they were derided and despised as ‘tailors, leather-sellers, soap-boilers... weavers, tinkers’, as well as ‘new preachers, Greene the felt-maker, Spencer the horse-rubber... mighty sticklers in this new kind of talking trade, which many ignorant coxcombs call preaching’. You will recall the way the Separatist preachers were similarly taunted as being ‘guides fit for them, cobblers, tailors, felt-makers, and such-like trash’. Did those critics never read in the New Testament of Paul who – as occasion demanded, or where larger principles were at stake – maintained himself and others by manual labour (Acts 18:3; 20:34; 1 Cor. 9:14-15; 1 Thess. 2:9)?

Nevertheless, it is a clear principle of Scripture that, wherever possible, men who labour for Christ in the gospel ministry should be kept and

supported by the church, and set free from all financial worries, that they might preach and teach the word of God (1 Cor. 9:4-14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

Even so, this was not always possible among the early Baptists, and men who were compelled to labour with their hands, in addition to labouring in the gospel, ought not to have been despised. Rather, they ought to have been commended. John Penry had been much nearer the mark when he said: ‘They whose hearts the Lord hath touched would thresh to get their living rather than the people should want preaching’. Men of the calibre of Henry Ainsworth – men who could live on ‘boiled roots’ and the like, and yet still preach with power – ought to be praised and not censured. And the same principle applies today. It is to be hoped that men who are forced to work at another job, in addition to their gospel labours, these days are not looked down upon as second-class ministers, and that ‘such like trash’ does not represent any current attitude towards these men. If it does, God will surely call to account those who sneer at his worthy servants. Christ knows what it feels like (Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30) and he succours his people in their trials (Heb. 4:15-16).

What the critics of the Baptists were doing by using this kind of language, was to deride the lack of learning of the Particular Baptists in comparison to very many of the Anglican and Puritan ministers who were university men. Yet this was a mistake and a gross injustice. In truth, several of the Separatists, including the Baptists, were graduates before they turned Separatist. Not only that, it was very hard on the Separatists to criticise them for not going to university when it was closed against them. Their Separatism cut them off from university. But, that admitted, is academic learning the great essential for the ministry, in any case? I know it is possible to deride learning, and that is a great mistake. But it is also possible to make an idol of learning, and that is equally blameworthy. These days, the pendulum is swinging too much in the latter direction. There is a growing love of learning; and a love of showing it. We are suffering, as one modern wit has said, from a rash of ‘foot and note disease’.<sup>4</sup>

We do not need a more academic ministry. We must not forget that in the Bible, God used men like market-gardeners, herdsmen, fishermen, tax-collectors and tent-makers to take his word to the people and to ‘turn the world upside down’. Indeed, was not Christ himself a carpenter in despised Nazareth? What we *do* need these days – as always – is men who are filled with the Spirit of God, and who are mighty preachers. We need more than orthodoxy – we need *fire*. It is undeniably true that the early Particular

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<sup>4</sup> I let this stand in this second edition, even though, in my later works, I have so obviously broken my own rubric!

Baptist preachers *were* endued with the Spirit of God, they ‘carried conviction... and constructed spiritual churches to the glory of God’. We have seen something of just how fruitful their preaching was. Many churches were formed by their ministry, their numbers increased, and their church life was warm and spiritual under their preachers. Furthermore, their churches were prepared to face bitter years of suffering without flinching. Alright, they may have been ‘cobblers, felt-makers and such-like trash’ in the eyes of their critics, but they must have been powerful preachers as well. I do not for one minute detract from the great Puritan preachers. All honour to them. They were spiritual giants; far be it from me to take away from them any recognition due to their name. But it must not be thought that the Baptists were inferior preachers because they did not all have the benefit of an academic training.

Let one of the greatest Puritan minds of all time have the last word on this point. John Owen, generally reckoned to be the most accomplished and learned theologian that England has ever produced, was asked by the king why he was so fond of listening to the Particular Baptist John Bunyan preach, ‘to hear a tinker prate’, as the king sarcastically expressed it. Owen replied: ‘May it please your Majesty, could I possess the tinker’s abilities for preaching, I would willingly relinquish all my learning’. This is the spirit we need today.

As we have seen, Independency led directly to the Particular Baptists, and in the light of that, the following testimony is very important: ‘It was from Independency, not Presbyterianism, that English Puritanism was to draw its strength’. It is admitted, of course, that the battle for church life in the 1640s was fought by the Presbyterians also, and they did many wonderful things. They accomplished much – not least through their mighty (but not infallible) Westminster Confession – but they made their mistakes as well. Granting the undisputed impact made by the Presbyterians, too often the massive contribution made by the despised Particular Baptists has been neglected, or worse. The truth is, they did ‘construct spiritual churches’, churches that were formed on the basis of the New Testament and not the theories of Constantine.

And it is the building of spiritual churches which is of the utmost importance – not the raising of massive edifices in stone – but the conversion of sinners, the forming of them into churches, and then their life-long edification in those churches according to the apostolic pattern. This is what is required; it is the desperate need of the hour. We are crying out for more preachers of this stamp in our time. I am sure that of the hearers of many a Particular Baptist preacher in the 1640s it could be truly said: ‘Then those who gladly received his word were baptised... And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the

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breaking of bread, and in prayers' (Acts 2:41-42). May God grant us the same.

The Particular Baptists fought valiantly in the battle to recover the New Testament church, and, by God's grace, they saw many spiritual churches formed out of sinners saved under their preaching. Of these converts it could be properly said: 'You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 2:5).

Not only that. Richard Fitz had been right, eighty years before. Suffering is a mark of a true church. The early Particular Baptists found it so; the experience of Paul in Thessalonica was repeated over and over again. He wrote:

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us (1 Thess. 2:13-15).

Exactly so. That is what this book has been all about. It was a battle to recover the New Testament church during the years 1517-1644. It was a battle to establish the New Testament churches in the first place. It was a battle to maintain them. It always is. It always will be. To be a Christian, to belong to a true church, will always bring suffering (John 15:20; Acts 14:22; 2 Cor. 4:9-12,16-18; Phil. 1:27-30; 2 Tim. 3:12; Rev. 1:9; 12:11; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24). To become a Christian is to become a soldier. There will be no end to the battle, no discharge from the war, until Christ returns. But on that day all the victory trumpets shall sound. And then:

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying: 'Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honour and power to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are his judgements, because he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants shed by her... Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready'. And to her was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Rev. 19:1-8). And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying: 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their

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eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away' (Rev. 21:1-4).

'Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!' (Rev. 22:20).

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He saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his power known... He saved them from the hand of him who hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy... Then they believed his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel, but lusted exceedingly... and tested God... And he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul

Psalm 106:8-15

*The course of the Civil Wars – Cromwell – end of Presbyterian power – liberty under Cromwell – Cromwell dies – Charles II – the Presbyterians scheme – they are outwitted – the Savoy Conference – the Church of England rigidly set as Elizabeth, James, Charles and Laud had wanted – the Act of Uniformity, 1662 – Puritan defections from the State Church – persecution of all Dissenters – toleration under William and Mary, 1688 – rapid spiritual decline in the churches – terrible consequences – failure to stop the rot – Whitefield and Wesley*

Reader, I have nearly reached the end of my account, but before I pack my keyboard and mouse away (that is, for this particular publication), I will indicate how the history of the church in England developed after 1644. A brief look may prove helpful for those who have little knowledge of the events.

Sadly, as throughout these pages, politics continued to be entwined with the church, especially in the years leading up to the early 1660s. Because of this, various Presbyterian groupings were formed, alliances which were religious or political or both. Furthermore, those who moved in these circles were prepared to switch loyalties, and this muddied the water to such an extent it is impossible to speak of the Presbyterians; in short, there was no one Presbyterian party. Nevertheless, for simplicity I will have to speak as though there was. The same goes for the Independents. The point is, we must not think of the emergent groups as though they were rigidly defined in the way they later became with the development of denominational attitudes. Needless to say, such political and religious fluidity greatly confuses the issue for us at this distance. More important, it must have complicated matters for the people at the time!

King Charles I, as we have seen, began the First Civil War when he raised his standard at Nottingham on the 22nd of August, 1642. At first, the course of the war went against the largely Presbyterian Parliament; so

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much so it was obliged to seek help from the Presbyterian Scots. This was forthcoming on condition that the English Parliament accepted the *Solemn League and Covenant*, which it did in September, 1643, thus imposing Presbyterianism upon England, with severe penalties for Dissenters.

I have said that the politics of the period are extremely complicated and difficult to unravel, especially at this distance. Here is another illustration of the point. There is evidence, as I mentioned in ‘The Cambridge Wonder’, to support the view that Presbyterianism was not deeply entrenched in English minds at the start of the Civil Wars. So to speak of a ‘largely Presbyterian Parliament’ may seem a little misleading. After all, we know that Baxter, writing in 1681, blamed the *Episcopalian* members for taking up arms against the king. According to Baxter, the Wars were not the fault of the Presbyterians. It could not be, he said, since ‘the members yet living profess that at that time they knew but one Presbyterian in the House of Commons’. In other words, according to Baxter the Presbyterians were not to blame for the Wars, seeing they were hardly represented in Parliament. In contrast to that view, however, there is clear evidence that there was a Presbyterian majority in Parliament. While it is true to say that Presbyterianism was not popular with the people out in the country, nevertheless many of the politicians wanted it. So what can we make of Baxter’s claim? We have two conflicting accounts. Which is correct?

My own view, for what it is worth, is to wonder if the memories of those members Baxter referred to might not have been somewhat ‘adjusted’ by the passage of forty years. The date of Baxter’s writing, 1681, is not without significance. A great deal had happened by then. I do ask myself if ‘political correctness’ played any part in their remembrances. After the Wars, no doubt many wanted their actual part in them to be enhanced or diminished in the public eye, depending on the current attitude of those in power. ‘What did *you* do in the Wars, Daddy?’ might have made more than one father squirm, especially when the question was posed, not by an infant, but by those who had power to exact revenge if they did not like the answer. In short, to my mind there seems too much evidence against a simple acceptance of Baxter’s apology. The Presbyterians were implicated; in fact they were in it up to the neck. But it is also true to say that Presbyterianism had not gripped the English people in general. In this division there was a conflict in the making.

To get back to 1643: Because the War was dragging on, the English Parliament needed to entertain a political alliance with the Scots but they did not really want a *Scottish* Presbyterian Church. The Scottish army they needed badly; their State Church system they wished to avoid, at least in all its details. Hence they craftily inserted an escape clause in the treaty;

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Parliament agreed to the Scottish demand to set up a Church of a Reformed nature in England, but only as defined ‘according to the word of God’, as they put it. This was a deliberate ambiguity towards the Scots, and meant that England never did adopt the Scottish system. They could go for a more moderate form of Presbyterianism when the time came, ‘a lame Presbyterianism’, as it turned out. It was a clever ploy. How could the Scots refuse the clause since they were convinced their Church was entirely scriptural? Yet, by that same clause, England effectively kept itself clear of the Scottish Presbyterian system. Nevertheless, much trouble would come out of this political trickery.

As the war lumbered on, Parliament, now with the aid of the Scots, gradually gained the upper hand over the Royalists. Oliver Cromwell, a rising cavalry leader, played an increasingly important part in the Army’s triumph. Victory over the king was eventually gained on the 24th of June, 1646, with the fall of Oxford, the king having surrendered to the Scots in the April of that same year. A flurry of scheming activity followed the end of open warfare as the Scots now attempted to strike a bargain with the king. What! Strike a bargain with the king? So much for the support of the Presbyterian Scots on the side of the Presbyterian Parliament against him! There are clear signs of double-dealing here. But it proved a frustrating experience for the Scots, who eventually got fed up with the lack of progress, and handed Charles over to Parliament in exchange for £200,000. Their negotiations with the king had failed. They had wanted to agree terms with him if at all possible, but it proved too much even for their considerable diplomatic skills. Their aim had been to get the king to impose their form of Presbyterianism in England if they restored him to the throne. The all-consuming idea seemed to be to establish Presbyterianism as the State religion in England, one way or another. The talks got nowhere.

During the following year, Charles embarked on his usual scheme of lying at every turn; on the one hand promising Parliament he would set up Presbyterianism for them if he was restored, but also covertly negotiating a very different set of terms with the Army. Nonetheless, all such talks came to nothing. How could there be any other outcome? Charles was simply playing a double game, merely buying time with no intention whatsoever of keeping his side of any bargain he might agree to. As he wrote in a letter to a friend, his aim was ‘to draw either the Presbyterians or the Independents to side with me for extirpating the other’. When – or if – that delightful prospect was realised, he explained, why, then he would be ‘really king again’. He also plotted secretly with the Scots, continuing to promise them that he would establish Presbyterianism in England and persecute Independents along with all kinds of Separatists – both

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Congregationalists and Baptists – if only a Scots army would invade England for him, and put him back on the throne. The king wanted the throne, and he would promise anything to anybody if they would only help him get it back.

On the other side, the Parliaments of both Scotland and England each had their own agenda. The one great aim on the part of the many was to set up State-Presbyterianism in the two kingdoms. They yearned so strongly for it that they were willing to go almost any lengths to reach their goal, even to the extent of treating with a liar-king. The English Presbyterian Parliament even wanted to disband the Army who stood in their way! The point I raised earlier – concerning the trickery underfoot between the English and the Scots – must not be forgotten. It certainly made things very perplexing for all concerned. Who could trust whom? We may sadly reflect that in this way all the parties to the sordid business tried to serve their own interests, while the church of Christ was treated as a football in the middle. However, all the tragic, squalid compromises and tawdry deals which were proposed could only postpone the inevitable; in truth, they contributed to it.

The outcome of the brinkmanship was the Second Civil War, which began on the 30th of April, 1648, the Presbyterian Scots having invaded England on the side of the Royalists. Reader, did you spot it? The Scots had changed sides! They had invaded England, even though there was a *Solemn Covenant* agreed between the two nations. Think of that! The English Parliamentary Army, for its part, was incensed at this treacherous act by the king in opening yet another war, and they rightly resolved to bring ‘Charles Stuart, that man of blood, to an account for the blood he had shed’. This was done through the magnificent generalship of Oliver Cromwell, now a commander, a military genius to his finger-tips, one who was superb in the direction of the Army. It has been said of him that he ‘won every battle he fought, and took every town he besieged’. Thus he and his Army, ‘his lovely company’ as he called them – made up largely of Independents, Baptists and other Separatists – defeated Charles and the Presbyterian Scots. And so it was that the king, ‘that man of blood’, was finally brought to trial and sentenced to death for his crimes against the people of England. The execution was duly carried out on the 30th of January, 1649. The Commonwealth had begun.

The Scots rapidly moved to proclaim the dead king’s son, Charles II, as their king, but it was actually from Ireland that the Royalists threatened to strike. Cromwell was appointed to head a command to deal with this rising, and to prevent the Irish Papists forging an alliance with various factions including Anglicans, Scots Presbyterians and some disaffected Parliamentary troops, all under the authority of Charles, Prince of Wales,

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who was exiled in France at the time. This last sentence should take some comprehending. Presbyterians in alliance with Papists? Is there a misprint? Surely it was not possible. But that is what was attempted. And such a confederation of disparate factions, if it once could have been welded together in some sort of common purpose, would then have formed an army to invade England; that was the aim. But what common purpose could Scottish Presbyterians, Irish Papists, and the profligate son of Charles Stuart have? Was there no end to the compromises the Presbyterians were willing to make to get what they wanted? The Stuarts were at least consistent in their inconsistency, but surely the vacillating antics of the Presbyterians at this time were a disgrace. Is there no limit to the depths the lovers of Constantine will stoop? Nevertheless, Cromwell by his decisive action in Ireland put a stop to all their schemes.

Nimble footed, Charles II (as he was known in Scotland) now negotiated with the Scots, who were, however, divided over the precise terms for backing the king. After internal wrangling, those Scots who wished to support Charles, yet did not advocate Presbyterianism, lost the day. If Charles was to get support out of the north, he soon discovered it had to be Presbyterian support. There was nothing for it, he had to appease that party. So he agreed to their terms to ‘become’ a Presbyterian, to accept *The Covenant*, and to impose Presbyterianism upon England and Ireland – once he became king. In return, the Scots promised to invade England to put Charles on his father’s throne.

What a sorry, sinful mess this was! What unwholesome reading it makes, even at this distance. This was Constantine gone mad! The fact is, Charles was a profligate sensualist. This was the man who would later boast about his sex-mad Court, bragging that ‘they have done me too much honour in assigning me so many fair ladies as if I were able to satisfy the half’. This vile man ‘become’ a Presbyterian? He was nothing but a ‘secret Papist’ for years! How could the Scots negotiate with the wretch? What were they thinking of – besides feathering their own nest by the political establishment of Presbyterianism in England? They had taken leave of their senses. What blindness, in any case – to try to establish religion by force of arms and political intrigue. But for the Presbyterians of Scotland to make use of a debauched man like Charles Stuart beats all. This is a blot upon their fine history which can never be expunged.

Cromwell, now Commander-in-Chief, marched the Army into Scotland to put a stop to the threat from the north. Thus, on the 3rd of June, 1650, the Third Civil War began. This war proved decisive as Cromwell demonstrated his masterly qualities of generalship yet again. He was simply supreme in the field. He had long since ‘acquired the government of himself, and over himself acquired the most signal victories, so that on

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the first day he took the field against the external enemy, he was a veteran in arms, consummately practiced in the toils and exigencies of war', as Milton expressed it. In this final Civil War, Cromwell put his consummate skill to masterly use against his enemies, overwhelmed them, thereby enhancing his reputation as one of the greatest generals of all time and of all nations. He gained the most tremendous victory over the Royalists, snatching it out of defeat, while facing overwhelming numbers and suffering horrendous difficulties. Charles and the Scots were finally defeated at Worcester on the 3rd of September, 1651, after which the Prince of Wales fled to France, where he promptly gave up his Presbyterianism! So much for his fine promises to the Scots. But at least they learned his promises were useless. They would never trust him again. Or would they?

While all this had been going on, the Puritans – who were at the height of their Parliamentary powers during the Wars – had set up the Westminster Assembly in order to settle a uniform religion upon England. The Assembly duly sat from 1643 to 1649. It was made up of over one hundred and twenty ministers, mostly Presbyterian in sympathy, although the deliberations were much leavened by a handful of Independents. No Separatists of any shade were invited. As just noted, religious uniformity was the overriding aim; there simply had to be one established Church and religion, with no dissent whatsoever. The handful of Scots who attended the Assembly, Presbyterians of course, exercised a great influence in the protracted, wearing discussions to try to resolve the contentious issue of the government of the State Church. Their intention was to bring the Independents to accept Presbyterianism, if at all possible. Indeed, the Assembly was eventually swayed to the view that State-Presbyterianism offered the only way forward, seeing it was the only scheme which had any chance of meeting all the Puritanical requirements.

The Scots were able to wield so great a power in the exchanges despite their smallness of numbers when compared to the more numerous English because, as I noted when looking at Perkins and after, the English Presbyterians had largely given up the fight to obtain their system during the first half of the 17th century; it was up to the Scots in the 1640s. The Scots knew what they wanted; the English were not quite sure. This made a big difference.

The main consideration that concentrated Puritan minds at Westminster was a 'fear of the growing Sectarianism, determination to preserve an established Church-State, and a strong desire to maintain the status and authority of the clergy'. This religious *cum* political monster had to be all-embracing and absolute. Nonconformity was unthinkable. The Scot, Baillie, for instance, complained of the Independents who were working

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against this notion because, he said, they wanted churches to be composed only of the regenerate. He lamented, they ‘will admit of none to be members of their congregations of whose true grace and regeneration they have no good evidences’. Baillie admitted that if this principle were applied to the Reformed Churches – the Presbyterians in particular – only about one in forty members would remain! What an appalling testimony!

But if Baillie’s words concerning the Independents are corrected to read ‘churches’ instead of ‘congregations’, what he complained of was even more true of the Baptists. They insisted on marks of regeneration *before they baptised and welcomed any into membership*. Baillie did not get it quite right; the Independents allowed the sprinkled infants of believers as church members. It was the Baptists alone who went the whole hog back to the New Testament, and restricted church membership to baptised believers only. The Westminster Assembly acted in direct contradiction to this, and longed for a State Church which embraced all – the regenerate and unregenerate – to the extent that ‘nearly the whole population might be included in the Church, even though few of them might have an experimental knowledge of the gospel’. It was Constantine *par excellence*.

I have said some stern things about the Assembly, and been critical of its basis and aim. It is only fair to say equally strongly that the Assembly did much excellent work to produce a Confession of Faith, two Catechisms, a Directory of Worship, along with a Form of Church Government. In addition it approved Francis Rous’ metrical version of the Psalms for use in worship. Though we have seen from time to time that these documents are not without their faults – some of them grievous – nevertheless, on the whole, they make up a fine body of divinity. The warning given above concerning the political background to the decisions on the government of a State Church must be heeded, however. The article on the order of church government itself leaves much to be desired.

The Church of Scotland accepted the Presbyterian Westminster standards in 1647, and the Particular Baptists and the Congregationalists later used the Assembly’s statements in their own formulations. If imitation is the best form of praise, the Westminster Confession has received high commendation. It has been rightly said:

Upon the whole, the Assembly’s Confession, with all its faults, has been ranked by very good judges among the most perfect systems of divinity that have been published on the Calvinistic principle in the last age.

Unfortunately, some Christians seem to think the documents are inspired, and they quote them as though they possess an authority equal to that of Scripture. How many think, for example, that ‘the chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever’ comes from the Bible? And some Presbyterian ministers actually preach through the Confession instead of

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the Bible! Equally bad, I admit to knowing of a series of sermons by a Reformed Baptist minister on the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession! We must preach the Scriptures, not any compilation of mere men. I have said some obvious things throughout this book, I know, but none more obvious than that.

While they continued to enjoy their brief hold on power, the Presbyterians grasped their chance to try to establish a uniform Church of England, its Presbyterian form being enforced with a rod of iron. We have already glanced at their bitter attack upon the Baptists above all. But though the Assembly might demand a Presbyterian order for the State Church, replete with its complicated system of ascending courts of discipline and government, Parliament was jealous of its own rights. Apparently, both sides in the Constantine system – the political and the religious – wanted to be top dog! The point has been made before: There can only be one master, even in the house of Constantine. Despite all the in-fighting, however, on the 6th of June, 1646, the House of Lords duly passed the Ordinance which replaced the old Episcopalian Church of England with its new Presbyterian form.

Notwithstanding all the hopes this raised in Presbyterian hearts, immediately the new Church ran into troubled waters, for ‘to all parties it was alike unwelcome’; that is, to all parties outside the inner circle. Especially ‘a furious controversy raged between the Presbyterians and the Independents’, the latter by this time persuaded of the rightness of toleration for alternative views, and wanting it. No, came the stern reply, toleration would be offensive to God, it would put the seal of approval on schism, it would promote heresy, it would justify the Sects, especially those wretched Anabaptists – who wanted that! – and the chaos would be complete. The Presbyterians would not allow the principle of gathered churches to stand; no, not under any circumstances. They even wanted to impose the Star Chamber Decree all over again and censor the press, but the use Milton and others made of the pen proved too strong for them.

The Scots threw in their weight on the side of Parliament and Church. They declared ‘against toleration of Sectaries and liberty of conscience’ since, they declared, to grant this would be a mortal blow to all true religion, and nourish nothing but heresy and factions. And whatever the weak English might do, the Scots vowed they would never change their views but ‘live and die for the glory of God, and the entire preservation of the truth’; in other words, a Presbyterian State Church, uniform throughout the entire realm. That is what the Wars were all about from their point of view, and that is what it was going to be. Sermon after sermon to Parliament stoked the fire by complaining of the Sects, demanding the Presbyterian system, and refusing liberty for voluntary religion, calling it

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‘an opinion most pernicious and destructive’ both to the souls of men and to the State. The Scots called upon the English to fulfil their obligation to impose Presbyterianism and root out toleration. In this they were aided by many English preachers. Joseph Caryl, Alexander Henderson, Matthew Newcomen, Stephen Marshall, Robert Baillie, Cornelius Burgess, Francis Taylor, Thomas Case, John Lightfoot, Richard Vines, Thomas Hodges, Simeon Ashe... the list of men – both Scots and English – who insisted upon the suppression of the Sects and the establishment of a uniform Presbyterianism, is formidable indeed. A few voices were heard in Parliamentary sermons on the opposite side but, alas, the pressure for a rigid uniformity was very strong.

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Reader, you will recall my claim that very serious thought must be given to all of this. I repeat: It is far more than a collection of interesting historical facts. Lessons have to be learned, but not of a political or military nature in these pages at least; we must draw *spiritual* conclusions from these sad events. What is more – and if I read the times aright – these lessons are desperately needed, especially among evangelicals at the present time; perhaps above all among Reformed Christians. Before we proceed with the history we need to pause and try to grasp what was going on in the 1640s, and to learn from the mistakes which were made.

Although God brought good out of the events, the Civil Wars were a terrible disaster – and not only because of the appalling cost in human life. Of course the causes of the Wars were complex and many, but it is the spiritual aspect of both the cause and cost which must concern us. The Wars arose as the culmination of mad and wrong policies pursued by a succession of monarchs, bishops, Continental, English and Scottish Reformers, Puritans and some Separatists who all had one thing in common; they all believed in the system of Constantine in one way or another. They all wanted to force their own system of religion on all the rest. The Puritans thought men ought to be forced, full stop; the early Separatists thought men ought to be forced to be free, forced to choose. One after another, most of the advocates of this system, from Luther onwards – indeed from Constantine – eventually got the chance to impose their views on everybody else.

It fell to the Anabaptists to break the mould one hundred and twenty years before the advent of the Civil Wars, and they had now been joined by the Baptists who, for the last thirty years, had been making their powerful appeals for tolerance and religious liberty. In contrast to the views of the Puritans and Separatists, the Baptists argued that men ought to be free. If only the people had heeded. But all the enlightened appeals issued by

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Blaurock, Grebel, Smyth, Helwys, Busher and others were of little or no avail. The arguments of such despised men were dismissed; they counted for nothing in the great scheme of things, at least as envisaged by those in power, or who thought they were. Few would listen; none in high places. In the 1640s religion and politics, the Church and the State were still thoroughly mixed up. Horribly mixed up. In fact Charles and Laud had virtually forged them into one body politic.

Petition after petition to Parliaments and kings; constant talk of armies, weapons and war; repeated Acts of Uniformity and various Ordinances to bolster the enforcement of a uniform religion, and the persecution of all Dissenters by the power of magistrates; the regulation of churches by civil authorities; censorship; the use of the stake, fire and prison; years of brandings, strangulations, drownings, slittings, floggings and all the rest. Where did it all come from? Where was the authority for men to bring about the reform of the church with weapons like these? From the New Testament? Never! There is not a scrap of support for it in the apostolic writings. The sorry, foul shambles came from the doctrine of Constantine and not Christ. The church of God can never be brought back to its original pattern by these diabolical means and the use of carnal weapons. How could godly men think it was the way? Staggeringly, they did. And not only think it; they acted on it. And where did it all lead? To three Civil Wars. One of the major causes of the horrendous bloodshed throughout those terrible years was the attempt on the part of the powerful to set up the kingdom of Christ by political means.

The Puritans, in company with others, were guilty in this respect. In the 1640s, they fairly leapt at the idea that a Parliament favourable to their point of view would bring about the establishment of a uniform religion. After all the years of waiting, at length their turn had come and now they would get their way. The Anglicans, the Anabaptists, the Separatists and all the rest of them had better watch out, now that the Presbyterians had the whip-hand at last. And a Parliament was in place which would establish their system for them. Or so they hoped. And as their power grew...? The prospect was fearsome. Out would go bishops; in would come...? But, as Milton put it, ‘New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large’. Oppression would remain the order of the day. A new tyrant in the saddle maybe, but the old tyranny just the same.

The concept of religion enforced by politics and the sword, I repeat, is utterly wrong, it is totally opposed to the New Testament. And it is – and was – doomed to failure. The Puritans would find it so when they tried it in the 1640s. Quite right; it is utterly contrary to God’s word, and therefore had no chance of success, even in the hands of the godly. State-Puritanism would take a little time to fall apart, yes, but God’s word cannot be broken.

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The Presbyterians who thought that force of arms and politics would establish their religion for them ought to have remembered the words of Scripture, words which stood sternly against what they were endeavouring to do. Christ said: ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight... but now my kingdom is not from here’ (John 18:36). And ‘all who take the sword will perish by the sword’ (Matt. 26:52). Paul said that ‘we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:3-5). We are to ‘be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might... For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places...’ (Eph. 6:10-20). This is our warfare; these are our weapons.

How could Parliament, especially a Puritan Parliament, of all Parliaments, even think of enforcing a uniform religion upon the nation? What if it did get its way? What system would satisfy all the different factions within that nation? Would it be Episcopacy, Independency, Congregationalism or Presbyterianism or... what? It was a hopeless dream; a nightmare, more like. Although Puritanism seemed to reach its zenith in the 1640s, it was in reality reaching its end; State-Puritanism had only about twenty years to live, for in 1662 its life would be snuffed out! The State-Puritan political victory in the 1640s was only temporary; within twenty years its sun was to set. And it would set in blood.

Yes, it is a mere platitude to say there were many godly and great men among the Puritans, but that must not blind us to the fact that they were mistaken when they clung to the Constantine idea of building the church. It is a truism to say that they made massive contributions to the cause of Christ, but their political machinations did immense damage also. The reality is, the church was being truly reformed outside the State system, as I explained in the previous chapter. In other words, the battle to recover the pattern of church life as found in the New Testament was not fought in Parliamentary debates, nor by hordes of soldiers on muddy fields with pike and musket; it was fought with spiritual weapons. The kingdom of God was not ushered in as men were gored with cold iron, slashed to ribbons by the sword, or blasted to pieces with shot. Nor did it come about by the plots of the great and the good as they cobbled together their political arrangements, or as they refined their clever plans drawn up in secret huddles. Rather, it was done through prayer, preaching and spiritual discipline in local churches, churches which were often despised by those in power. Politicians may argue and soldiers may fight to establish political

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settlements, nonetheless Christians must not try to order the church by such means. While the Separatists and Independents were not entirely without fault in these matters, by and large it was among them – and among the Baptists above all – that the New Testament way of reformation was carried on.

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We must apply the weighty lessons we learn from the events which led up to Civil War. In the first place, do not think that this argument over Constantine – the union of Church and State – is out of date, mere history and of no consequence to us. Do not imagine that we have got beyond this sort of thing, that the disasters of the 1640s can never happen again, that we are all far too mature these days. To take that view would be to make a disastrous mistake. The attempt to mix politics and religion is not yet dead, no, not by a long way. Politics, instead of the gospel, can still be heard from pulpits in England, if nowhere else.

Let me illustrate what I mean. This dabbling with political influence, this fawning on the establishment, is evidenced by evangelicals, even Reformed Christians – Baptists, of all people – who will persist in sending petitions to Parliament about religious matters. There is even a hankering after some kind of world-wide association to ensure that the voice of the gospel is much better heard. Or, to take another case, some fresh mark of spiritual degeneracy hits the headlines – the divorce rate is up, the shops are open on Sundays, or whatever – and what do many Christians do? What is their immediate reaction? It is almost instinctive. Draw up or sign another petition to MPs! Something must be done about it, they say. Pass a law, they clamour. Do whatever is necessary to make men conform to Scripture. Many cling to a vague hope that the House of Commons will somehow or other pull their religious chestnuts out of the fire for them. There is a sense of desperation in the air. The church and the preachers are patently failing to stem the tide of evil. Parliament can and must act!

I say it is all a huge blunder. Pagans, of course, might well call for moral campaigns by politicians, seeing they have little else to cling to. Christians must not. Yet, mistakenly, they do. Many Christians appeal to Parliament to keep ‘Sunday Special’, to have Christianity taught in schools along with ‘a daily act of worship’ and other similar measures to Christianise society. It is sheer nonsense! Dangerous nonsense. These procedures actually do much harm to the cause of Christ; they certainly do not advance it. When all is said and done, what are these misguided people hoping to produce? What is a Christian society? Apart from the church, there is nothing of the sort.

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It is not the job of the world to establish the gospel for us; it cannot do it in any case. It is the preacher's job to do it, supported by prayer; it is not the work of the politician. It is only the gospel preacher, used by the Spirit of God, who can change men's hearts. We do not want millions of unregenerate men and women to give a mere and unwilling conformity to Scripture; we want their conversion. They must be born again. No political ploy can bring this about! Only the Spirit of God working through the preached gospel can accomplish this end. It is worse than useless to force pagans into a grudging acceptance of our principles, to make them conform to what we know is good for them. The need is for sinners to be 'born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God' (1 Pet. 1:23), 'born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God' (John 1:13). Spiritual methods must be used to get spiritual results. Abraham produced a son by the flesh and see where it got him; look at the consequences! Have we lost confidence in the power of spiritual weapons and placed our trust in politics and politicians? It certainly seems as though we have, even though no good can come from putting confidence in princes, and vain is the help of man (Ps. 118:8-9). Reader, when you hear some awful news – the rise of violent crime or whatever – what is your reaction? Do you think of Parliament? Or do you cry to God to raise up powerful preachers and use them to change men's hearts? Society at best can only try to tame sinners; even in that it fails. Christ does not tame sinners; he delivers them (Mark 5:4,15,19).

Do you write to Town Councils, MPs or magistrates with requests and appeals for what amounts to their enforcement of your religion upon hardened sinners? Are you aiming to stop pagans in their sinning ways by your use of the civil law? You are playing the very game which was played during the 16th and 17th centuries. Indeed, it has been played ever since the disastrous interference by Constantine, well over a thousand years before the Puritans. You are trying to force your religious views on others who do not agree with you, and trying to do it by political means. It is totally without New Testament warrant. Stop it. The gospel principle stands – the weapons of our warfare are spiritual, not carnal (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Some courts in America actually impose sentences of compulsory church attendance on convicted criminals. The motive may be good; the method is misguided – it is wrong. Going to church, a punishment? Have we taken leave of our senses? Do not petition the Queen or the Prime Minister over spiritual matters; pray to God instead. Pray that God would send out preachers, Spirit-filled preachers, powerful preachers. Pray for them. Support them. Encourage them. Attend their ministry. Reform your own life; you keep the Lord's day. Those who are most vocal in calling for

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an end to Sunday shopping had need to be most zealous for their own personal keeping of the Lord's day. Is it always so? I fear not. Much commercial and carnal activity takes place every Sunday, and – of all places – it takes place *within the church!* If only pagans knew of the hypocrisy! In any case, what business is it of ours to strive to get pagans merely to conform to the gospel? Paul was very plain on the matter. He told us that our job is to reform and discipline the church by spiritual means, not set out to change the world by political agencies (1 Cor. 5:12-13). Reader, your responsibility is to play your part in the full reform of your local church from within, not attempt to Christianise paganism.

Some evangelicals are too fond of telling pagans what to do, and not fond enough of applying the Scriptures to themselves. I know of a case where an elder of an evangelical church wrote a book in which he deplored the present spiritual declension of his town. He mentioned the annual carnival which takes place on a Sunday and the crowded theme park open every Lord's day. He wanted to know how evangelicals were coping with it. He complained that the preaching of the gospel in the town is not so prominent as it was. Yes, but when December 25th fell upon the Lord's day, the church of which he was an elder abandoned its normal Lord's day evening service! In that particular church the gospel was not preached at all that night, let alone prominently.

Moreover, if we cannot attract sinners to Christ by preaching his gospel, but have to resort to bribery on the one hand, or force on the other, what have we come to? Do some Christians actually believe that if they forcibly shut all shops and funfairs on Sundays, the miserable pagans who have nowhere else to go will be funnelled into our meeting-houses, and be converted? The reality of the gospel is precisely the other way round. We must preach, see sinners converted, and then the traders in Vanity Fair will have no Sunday business because the converted will not patronise them; not because they are forced to give up Sunday shopping, but because they will not want to desecrate the Lord's day. Remember Robert Browne's words, seventy years before the Commonwealth; 'the Lord's people are a willing sort', he said. Those words ought to be burned upon our hearts. One volunteer is worth ten pressed men, we are told; in the religious realm, pressed men are worthless. It is far worse than that. Men who are forced to pretend to be Christians, in order to satisfy those who impose laws upon them, will be damned themselves, and they will bring nothing but utter misery to the church. History – and contemporary church life – confirm it.

Furthermore, be warned; if Christians do persist in using governments and taking up political arms to bolster a crumbling Christianity, in the end it might well come to taking up physical weapons once again to impose a uniform religion. History will repeat itself. It looks most unlikely at the

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moment – perhaps – but remember, the testing time comes when men get their hands on power. What if that should happen to us or our descendants? We might be sowing the wind today by our petitions and campaigns; what if we reap the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7)? What if our children do? And if the unthinkable should occur, we shall find, as always, that those who take up the sword will perish with it. Yes, carnal, political knives have a nasty habit of cutting the very people who are the keenest to use them. Christians, for example, who appeal to Parliament to enact and strengthen blasphemy laws, might find that Muslims and others in a day not far distant will invoke those very laws against believers. The first signs of it are here already.<sup>1</sup> Islam might well get political power within a few short years. Then what? France, for one, is seeing a rise of Islamic popularity among the young. Nor is it asleep in England. Dangerous times are ahead, and some of the peril is of our own mad making. What is the Islamic sentence for those who blaspheme the name of Allah? And we know that Muslims are quite prepared to carry it out. We have made the whip for pagans to flay us with. It is worse; we have forged their swords for them, and they will use literal swords against us, make no mistake. We hear of a fresh reign of terror in Iraq as hands and ears are being cut off in an effort to stamp out crime of one sort or another. And it is alleged to be based on the Koran. Friends of Constantine, watch out! New masters are waiting their turn to force us into their mould.

But, it may be objected, what of 1 Timothy 2:1-2? Does this passage not oppose the above views? ‘Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence’. Does this passage not prove that the use of politics is right, that the State must enforce the gospel?

The answer to this is a most definite No! The teaching of the passage is that we must pray *for* kings; *pray* for them, not *petition* them to enforce our religion. We must pray that they may govern us wisely to ensure that the State is made politically stable and law-abiding. In this way we can live quiet, orderly lives and carry on our business – supremely our church and gospel business – freely. We are not to pray for the king, the Prime minister, or the President to establish our religion for us and somehow make pagans conform to our views. He might well be a pagan himself. Indeed, most of our present rulers are anything but Christians! How can they enforce the gospel for us? The present Prince Charles, for instance, says he wants to defend faith, rather than defend the faith. What a nice distinction! On his own admission, he did not keep faith with his late wife,

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<sup>1</sup> How fast, and how far, things have moved between 1997 and 2011.

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he did not keep his marriage vows. Consequently, how can he be trusted with defending any sort of faith? In any case, my faith is nothing to do with him. I do not require or want his defence of it, thank you very much. He himself stands in need of conversion! Why, as I write,<sup>2</sup> he is calling for State Lottery funds to be spent on religious buildings, including mosques and temples. No, 1 Timothy 2:1-2 does not lend the least support for us to use political power to promote or defend the gospel. That is not its teaching.

For Christians to use Constantine to set up Christ's kingdom is not only wrong, misguided and playing with fire, it is ridiculous. For example, surely Nonconformists must be able to see through the farce of a pagan Prime Minister being responsible for the appointment of an Archbishop of Canterbury for the Church of England. And what about the nonsensical possibility that a future king or queen – the Supreme Governor of the State Church – might well be a Buddhist or a Moslem? as long as he or she is not divorced and remarried, that is! Which, of course, Charles is. The mind boggles. Various laws were enacted years ago – even centuries since – by well-meaning politicians in the vain hope that those laws would ensure a Christian Succession and a Christian State – whatever those two might mean. But the entire business is nothing other than ludicrous. Is it not obviously so? Well then, why do many Christians persist in the political use of those very same weapons of the establishment, striving to bring about 'a Christian country'? It is hopeless – and worse – for this scheme might easily back-fire. For instance, Christians might put in place a statute to deal with the religious question of Succession, guarding against, say, Popery – hoping to ensure a Protestant on the throne – but that very law stopping a Papist might actually bring a Hindu as king! Similar things have happened before. Statutes framed against Papists were used against Anabaptists, and so on. Besides, laws which can cover every possibility are notoriously difficult to frame, so that civil ordinances have a nasty habit of producing something very different to what was intended – the law of unintended consequences.

To illustrate: When a certain library in America wanted to encourage people to read more books it advertised that dollar bills were placed inside some volumes. Did this bring about more reading, an increased lending-rate? It did not. What happened was, money-grubbers ran riot through the library, tearing open the books to find the dollars. More readers? It nearly destroyed the library! Similar examples could be multiplied. Think of the consequences of something like it in the religious world.

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<sup>2</sup> This was in 1997.

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Take another case: When a city authority wanted to put a stop to the litter problem caused by the dropping of aluminium cans, it offered a small fee for every can returned to a depot. Did this stop the litter? It multiplied it a thousand fold. How? Youths toured the city, ripping open all plastic rubbish sacks to recover any cans inside, leaving all the other rubbish to blow about the streets.

Yet one more: In the early 1960s, those responsible for the bus system in Manchester tried to enforce regular time-keeping by its drivers – for the convenience of the passengers. The conductor (or guard, as he was called) had to punch a card at certain specified stops along the route. At a glance, an inspector could tell if that particular bus had kept to time. Certain penalties of a financial nature, I suspect, were imposed for any failure. What was the outcome? The buses were never on time – except at the specified stations, where the authorities had placed the card-punching machine! At these stops, there would always be a queue of buses with their guards waiting to stamp their card. At the earliest possible moment allowed, the guard would punch his card, leap on to his bus, which would shoot off to the next checking station – and wait until the procedure could be repeated all over again! The law produced the very opposite to what was intended. Grace – telling the drivers to use their discretion and do their best to keep to time – would have produced far better results.

Laws and other civil measures cannot change men's hearts. They cannot turn non-readers into readers; they cannot make litter louts tidy and thoughtful; they cannot make sinners into saints. As one said in a sermon before Parliament in 1643: 'Alas, it is not a naked vote that passes within your walls that can vote our churches full and the taverns empty'. I wonder if we have learned anything in three hundred and fifty years. We know only too well that because of our sin, laws often do the direct opposite to what is intended and hoped for. Paul found that was what happened with the law of God itself, when sin took the commandment against covetousness, for instance, and stirred up evil desire within his heart (Rom. 7:7-8). The law – not even the law of God – could make him what he ought to be. Praise God for his *grace* in the gospel.

So, in the light of all the evidence, how did the Puritans come to think it right to try to apply God's law in a civil way and thus bring in the kingdom of Christ? How did they justify it? The answer is, they made the grievous mistake of basing their arguments on the nation of Israel, and not on the apostolic church; on the Old Testament and not the New. This should cause no surprise, bearing in mind that Calvin did a similar thing a century before. All the same, it was a mistake, for in the gospel age the system is entirely different to what it was for the nation of Israel. God has no special earthly nation now; the church is his nation (1 Pet. 2:9). 'There is neither

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Jew nor Greek' (Gal. 3:28). The Christian's 'citizenship is in heaven' (Phil. 3:20). Great Britain is not a Christian country. There is no such thing; there never has been; there never will be. That kind of talk is the foolish twang of Constantine, not the language of the New Testament. America is not God's own country. England is not the church, it was not the church in the 1640s, it never will be. The same goes for Scotland, Ulster and all the rest. But good men in 1640 thought England was the church or in some way the nation of God, and they acted upon the idea. And look where it got them. What is more, it can happen again. Indeed the warning signs are visible already. I understand some men preach under slogans like 'For God and Ulster'. No preacher should declare God's word surrounded by military or political flags. Our religion is for God (1 Cor. 10:31), and God only. How dare we turn it into a political prostitute?

The Puritans certainly did build too much on the examples of kings, wars and rebellions found in the Old Testament. Between 1641-1653, Parliament called for monthly Fast Sermons to itself, though they actually started on an occasional basis a year before. The majority of the Sermons were printed; if they met with Parliament's approval, that is. The figures of the published Sermons are clear; they speak for themselves. The texts chosen by the preachers were in the ratio 3:1, Old Testament to New; and 20% of the New Testament texts came from the Revelation. Between 1640 and 1645, the preponderance of Old over New reached almost 5:1. The Puritans thought of England as Israel and they wrongly applied Old Testament principles, wholesale, to the political and religious affairs of the nation.

In doing this, the 17th century was echoing the 16th. Richard Fitz had thought of England as favoured Israel; while King Edward, more than a decade before Fitz, had regarded the English as the chosen people of God. John Aylmer had taught that 'God is English'! Elizabethan Presbyterians like Thomas Cartwright had asserted that God was in covenant with the people by giving 'the seals... to our assemblies in England'. There was 'a virtual covenant... set up between God and England', he said. John Knox raised his voice similarly for Scotland. John Field had claimed that God had given himself to the English as a people – and not only to the elect within the nation. Following hard upon their predecessors' heels, the Puritans of the 17th century declared openly that God had made the English his elect. John Milton could say God's usual practice was to make his will known 'first to his Englishmen'. To the Puritans, England was the most favoured nation on earth, the very Israel of God. Many Scots, likewise, were persuaded that God was with them as a people. As Samuel Rutherford put it: 'Now, O Scotland, God be thanked, thy name is in the

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Bible'; taking the place of Israel, he meant. It was all a huge misunderstanding. And very costly.

Nor has it died. For instance, this kind of confusion came to the fore during the fiftieth anniversary of the D-day landings of June, 1944. Let me say at once that it was right and proper for the Allies to wage war against Nazi Germany. The defeat of Hitler and the destruction of his indescribably evil Reich was a noble end. Those who gave their lives in that war died in a worthy cause, and we who have lived to enjoy the liberty they fought for must be grateful to those who suffered, and continue to suffer. We ought ever to have a sense of debt to those who gave so much. Nor must we ever forget those who died for our freedom. All this is utterly self-evident.

But when a passage is read from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, speaking of all the trumpets sounding on the other side as Mr Valiant-for-Truth passed over, and it is made to apply to the soldiers who fell in the war – that is most improper. Nevertheless, this is the very thing which happened in the commemorations, and it gave a totally false picture. Those soldiers were not fighting for Christianity; or if they were it was a gross misunderstanding of what Christianity is, and how it is established. The war was a political affair. Allied forces did not fight to establish the church. The combatants were not Christian soldiers, though some think they were. Churchill was one such; he chose the hymn 'Onward, Christian Soldiers' for the Sunday service on board the *Prince of Wales* when he met Roosevelt, and the pulpit was draped with the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, he recorded. He, along with all the men, was deeply moved by the experience, he said. But the premise was utterly at fault. Neither the British nor American forces were made up of Christian soldiers. Nor were those who fell in the war saved because they died in a noble cause. This episode is an illustration of just how sadly politics and religion, preaching and war, can get mixed up when well-meaning people become muddled in their thinking. And the confusion brings tragic consequences in its wake.

Of course, it is perfectly clear that Israel in the Old Testament did advance its cause by war, the defeat of other nations and the subjugation of its enemies. Religion and politics, war and prophecy were very much united in those days, inasmuch as the old covenant was an external system, couched in material, earthly terms. Things are very different in the New Testament. Where is the New Testament justification for the use of force and political intrigue as the means of spiritual reform? There is none. The old covenant has been abolished in Christ; the New has come (John 1:17; Rom. 5:20 – 8:4; 2 Cor. 3:5-16; Eph. 2:11-22; Heb. 7:11 – 10:25). Christians must act in the light of this.

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But, says someone, should we not embody the ten commandments in our civil law? Would this not be a good thing to do? Is it not the right thing for Christians to aim for? Reader, think about it. It is one thing to frame civil laws regarding, say, the fourth commandment; though not all would agree on the precise details. Similarly, the punishment of murder is comparatively simple to regulate. Adultery, the seventh, might not be too difficult, although there would be differences over the possibility of remarriage. But how will we embody some of the other commandments in civil statute? What will we do to people who violate the first, the second, or the third? Indeed, how will we find out if a citizen breaks these commands? How will we prove it in a court of law? And what will we do to disobedient children – in terms of the civil law? What about lying and covetousness? And remember, we have to legislate in all these areas for the behaviour of pagans. Think of the practical consequences of putting evidence before the courts. Think of the veritable army of informers, snoopers and spies the measures would breed.

I suggest all this is impossible. Nor is it right; it goes against the gospel. Why does God write his laws on the hearts of his people in the new covenant? This is one of its glories. If nothing else, it must tell us something about the impossibility of enforcing these commands upon an *ungodly* people. A man needs to be converted and then receive continual supplies of the grace of God from the Holy Spirit before he will ever seek to order his life according to Scripture. It is not right to try to embody God's word in civil statute. At this stage, perhaps you might care to read the relevant passage in 'Geneva', and remind yourself of what happened during the attempt at that city under Calvin. It is possible to see why opponents of Calvin have nicknamed him the Moses of the Genevan Israel. How very sad. There is too much truth in it.

But even now, men persist in thinking in these legal terms. There is a new development in the Constantine outlook these days. And it is sinister. It is called 'Reconstructionism'. The idea is that governments exist to compel men to obey Scripture by law, the State must punish criminals by Old Testament penalties. For example, it is alleged that adultery must be punished by death, based upon Leviticus 20:10; likewise witches must be executed, Leviticus 20:27; blasphemers must be put to death, Leviticus 24:16, and so on. Some Christians advocate this sort of thing. They think that they will bring in the kingdom of God in this way.

These Christians, though well-intentioned, have forgotten the distinction between the Old and New Testaments. They have disregarded the contrast between Christ and Caesar (Matt. 22:21). They confuse the government of Israel of old with our present-day Parliamentary system. They entangle the State and the church. They forget that the kingdom of

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God is advanced by preaching the gospel, not by enforcing laws. Have they never read that even the law of God itself could not save men? ‘For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin’ (Rom. 8:3). ‘Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight’ (Rom. 3:20). It is useless, and worse than useless, to seek to bring in the kingdom by means of law, even the law of God. We must never forget that we live in the age of the Spirit. ‘The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17). In the light of all this, what hope is there for the laws of men? There is no place for political power in advancing the gospel. The ‘social gospel’ of the 20th century failed decades ago, and it will fail again.

The advocates of Reconstructionism also forget that Parliament can only reflect what the citizens are, and what they want; it cannot force people to become Christians. The Kremlin could not compel people to love Communism, could it? No matter how severe the laws, however bitter the punishments, whatever inducements they offered, the Kremlin could never make the Russians, the Poles, the Ukrainians, and so on, want to be Communists. For all their boastful claims, governments do not lead, they merely follow the people. Although Christians know what is good for pagans, that good cannot be imposed. Some present-day believers think it can. It is not a new idea. Remember how Cartwright foolishly called for magistrates to punish those who did not benefit from sermons. What madness!

Reconstructionists also have a tendency to link their ideas with some form of post-millennial view, believing that there is to be a golden age when all the world will be Christian, ushered in, no doubt, as they reconstruct society by law. This is a total fantasy. Moreover, it is a highly dangerous fantasy. There is no evidence in the New Testament that the early Christians were looking for a golden age, when all men would be regenerate, or at the very least outwardly conform to the gospel. The universal hope of the first Christians was the return of Christ to usher in the eternal state and kingdom of glory. The *eternal* state! Post-millennialists are in danger of looking for the millennium instead of ‘looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (Tit. 2:13).

Surely the New Testament speaks in a very different way to all this talk of law and politics? It does not lead us to think in terms of aggressive political power, does it? We are the salt and leaven of society (Matt. 5:13; 13:33), not noisy political wranglers. We are to work quietly, playing a full part as citizens, seeking to influence men by our daily lives, overcoming

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the attacks of paganism by what we are, by what we do and by what we say (Matt. 5:13-16; Phil. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:11-25; 3:1-17).

Reader, rest assured that I have not intended to say anything to support the view that we must withdraw from society, and not bear a Christian testimony wherever God has placed us, and as we have opportunity. Of course we must take an intelligent and active interest in politics. We must make our views known. Yes, and Christians can be magistrates or politicians. William Wilberforce is an exemplary case in point. But this is very different to what I have been criticising. It is a far cry from what went on in the 1640s. Politics do have an important role to play in society, but that role falls a long way short of gospel power, and is totally different to it. The power, the spiritual power and spiritual usefulness of the preacher exceeds by far the power of any Prime Minister, President or Dictator. To put it bluntly, in the spiritual realm the politician – as a politician – has no power at all.

Governments, law-makers, are one thing. What about the churches? The New Testament tells the church how to approach society. Think of the two great social problems for the early church – slavery and race relations. What did Paul do about them? What petitions did he send to governments? What civil laws did he want enacted to regulate the problems? None. The scriptural silence is deafening. He simply preached the gospel. He knew that once men were converted, these and other social ills would be put right in due course. What about perversion, drug abuse, gambling, drink and all the rest of it, these days? The glory of the gospel is that it does not offer laws and regulations and moralising about these matters. It offers hope. It offers a new, clean life. It offers salvation. It says – after conversion – to those who were once the most depraved of pagans, ‘and such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God’ (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Sinners become new men in Christ, ‘old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new’ (2 Cor. 5:17). This is another of the glories of the new covenant. Grace has come through Jesus Christ. The law failed but grace has come. We must not allow ourselves to throw away our glory. Politics may be ‘the art of the possible’, but thank God that prayer and preaching, by the Spirit of God, can do the impossible. The weapons of our warfare are indeed mighty through God. Why do we stupidly turn back to ‘weak and beggarly elements’ (Gal. 4:9)?

To sum up: We, in the churches, must always act scripturally, not politically. I have put before you some very real dangers connected with this Constantine business. I realise that all this may well sound alarmist and frankly heretical to some, probably to many. Come what may – I say it again – it is utterly wrong to use Parliament to try to urge Christianity upon

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men. I know that the view I have expressed represents the conviction of only a tiny minority, and its cry is very feeble when heard against the voice of the overwhelming majority. Nonetheless, even in this, history is repeating itself. In the 1640s, the State-Puritans were all-powerful. So much so, the feeble cries of the Anabaptists and Baptists could hardly be heard above the din and clamour for a uniform religion to be imposed by political force. But, ever since 1525, the Anabaptists had been calling for the gospel to be advanced by spiritual means only, for the tolerance of dissent, and for the complete overthrow of Constantine with a full-hearted return to the New Testament. From 1612, the Baptists had added their cry, and by the early 1640s, the Independents were joining their ranks. For all that, their words were to be drowned in a deluge of political wrangles which led, inexorably, to war, as we have seen. War with the king. Then war among themselves! Remember that; war among themselves. Will it be the same again?

\* \* \*

We left the history at the point where the Presbyterians had managed to forge their State Church, and were seeking to force a uniform observance of its rubrics throughout the realm. But, in his merciful providence, God raised up a man – Oliver Cromwell – to stem the tide of madness. He, along with his Army made up of Independents, Separatists and Baptists, would have none of it. He and they were for tolerance. The Baptists had long taught the virtue and necessity of tolerance, as I have explained, and the Independents had come to see it, too, even if somewhat belatedly. Therefore, having got rid of the tyranny of Laud, Charles and the bishops, Cromwell and his men were in no mind to let Presbyterians occupy the vacant seat, which, as events proved, they were more than eager to do. The Army under Cromwell – who was an Independent himself – had not fought three horrific Civil Wars, and suffered much harrowing loss and sorrow, to let one form of religious compulsion be replaced by another. A clash was inevitable. Thus, as I said above, after victory over the king, there was ‘a falling out among themselves’. This collision of interest could not long be delayed.

Cromwell was in no mood to allow a continuance of tyranny over men’s consciences, whether of the Popish, Episcopalian or Presbyterian variety. Tyranny was an evil; he simply would not have it. Nor was he a ‘Johnny-come-lately’ to the notion of tolerance. Had he not written:

I desire from my heart, I have prayed for it, I have waited for the day to see union and right understanding between the godly people, Scots, English, Jews, Gentiles, Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists and all.

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Such a man was not the sort to let non-Presbyterians be enslaved all over again, this time by an enforced Presbyterian uniformity. He was a man of tolerance, and tolerance it was going to be, after Cromwell was appointed the Lord Protector, and was given massive political power. Thus State-Presbyterianism came to an end and a new age was ushered in as the Protector used his position in the State, backed by his military power, to enforce religious tolerance and throw out uniformity! How odd! Odd? It was a staggering idea. The history of the world – and especially of the church – for the past thirteen hundred years, was about to be turned on its head. What a quirk of Constantine it was! Cromwell had fought with his Army and won, and now he used his political power in order to put a stop to the influence of military might and politics in the church, and to allow men to be free so that they might lead godly lives on a voluntary basis. As has been said:

The new conception was unashamedly Erastian, but Erastian with a novel twist. The authority of the State was to be exercised not for regulating religious doctrine and practice, but for preventing any such regulation. To make the establishment the instrument for enforcing an almost unlimited tolerance of opinion, and for uniting warring groups in a common zeal for godliness was Cromwell's ideal. Hence he could regard with equanimity the crazy patchwork of the Commonwealth Church at the parish level – a spectacle that to Anglican and Presbyterian alike seemed an intolerable nightmare.

Cromwell stands out as a spiritual giant in this business, towering like an Everest above the vast majority of his day. Though he made his mistakes, he did see things in this matter of Constantine and religious tolerance far more clearly than the Reformers a century before. Luther, Calvin and the rest, we know, were grievously muddled in their thinking about the subject. I remind you of the excuses men offer for Calvin's mistakes; he was 'a child of his century', they plead. Yes, so he was. But so was Oliver Cromwell. Yet Cromwell rose above the spirit of his age, far above the teaching of the previous thirteen hundred years, and largely went back to the New Testament. Smyth had made the journey thirty years earlier; the Anabaptists nearly a century before that. There must be no State enforcement of a uniform religion, the Protector declared. Cromwell actually wielded the power of the sword and possessed political muscle, but rightly – scripturally – he would use neither for the advance of the church nor for the defence of religion.

Just as one comparison among many, you may care to read again the appropriate section on Calvin's view of the State, the magistrate and civil power, as found in 'Geneva', and measure its sharp contrast to Cromwell's views. Calvin was wrong, and Cromwell was right on the matter. If only a willing tolerance had prevailed down the centuries, thousands upon

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thousands of lives would have been spared and not sacrificed upon the altar of Constantine. At last – at long, long last – somebody was going to put a stop to all the bloodshed in the name of religion; or try to, at least. Cromwell has been wickedly maligned in all generations since, as in his own day. He deserved far better than he received. Far better. The great day will declare it. Despite all the evidence we have seen, is it not sad to realise that men, women and children are still being butchered in the name of Constantine? When will this bloodthirsty Dagon fall, never to rise again? Will he never drink his fill of human blood?

As a consequence of the enlightened thinking during the years of the Commonwealth, under Cromwell's rule as Protector religious tolerance held the high ground, and it became the great feature of the time. It meant that congregations or churches were allowed to worship just as they desired; so much so, even non-Royalist Anglicans were permitted to worship in their own manner. Thus the State Church of England and the multifarious separated churches became a total mixture of Anglicans, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and Congregationalists. In practical terms, there was no such thing as Nonconformity, simply because there was no enforced uniform religion to conform to or dissent from. Believers did not have to dissent any more, seeing they could propagate their views and carry out their practices according to their understanding of Scripture. How healthy it was. It was not perfect – it never could be this side of glory – though some in that age did revive Chiliastic fantasies to think the millennium had dawned. This also coloured the politics, which continued to be enmeshed in religion to a certain extent. But to say that the times were an improvement on the past is to make an understatement of mammoth proportions.

Cromwell met with much abuse, as can easily be imagined; by those who wanted uniformity, for instance. But he was also attacked by those who might have been expected to support him, at least in his overall aims, seeing they had profited greatly by his efforts. For example, some Baptists, perhaps many, objected to Cromwell's title as Lord Protector; that belongs to Christ alone, they said. Vavasor Powell challenged his hearers to decide whether they wanted Jesus Christ or Oliver Cromwell to reign over them; they should pray to find the mind of God in the matter, he demanded. Powell knew what the answer would be! Many other criticisms arose out of mad prophetic dreams. George Fox, the Quaker, reproved the Army for not going to Rome to fight. Others incited Cromwell to exert himself 'to overthrow Antichrist'. Some Fifth monarchists, which included Baptists and Quakers, thought in terms of a godly army marching against the Turks and the pope. A commander of the Scottish Army hoped that his troops would be used to burn Rome to the ground. Troublous times for the

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Protector! He was assailed on all sides, it seems. However, in general ‘an exhausted peace’ had fallen upon the country, and Cromwell’s reign was a triumph of tolerance. It says much for the man that he coped so well with the crazy expectations of countless hot-heads, and kept them within bounds.

The only conditions which were imposed on the churches were that both Popery and Prelacy were forbidden, the *Book of Common Prayer* could not be used, and ministers had to be competent. Nevertheless, some who hankered for the old days under Laud tried to bring back or persist in the use of popish superstitions, Holy Days, Church festivals and the like even though it was contrary to the law. At Oxford, the Chapel at New College, for instance, was adorned ‘in its ancient garb’, while the same at Magdalen ‘was in pontifical order, and that abomination... the double organ, still existed’. The Catholic Fathers were yet drooled over by those who held to the myth of apostolic succession; among them the young student Thomas Ken, later to be appointed a High Church bishop. The devotees of this kind of religion naturally ridiculed and attacked Puritanical ministers of every shade, while the poor despised Baptists and Separatists came nowhere in their reckoning.

In fact, the law, once again, even in Cromwell’s capable hands, proved an inadequate weapon to reform men’s hearts. The abolition of the Prayer Book by statute, for instance, tended to be somewhat self-defeating; that which men could not have, they wanted. This is ever the case. Fallen man abuses even the law of God in this way, as has been noted before. On this occasion, meetings where the *Book of Common Prayer* was used were desired by many, and a ready supply was forthcoming in secret and, often, in public. Yes, ‘it was harder to abolish the Prayer Book than it had been to impose it’.

Cromwell persisted in his demand for competence in preachers, and a committee of Triers was set up in 1654 to root out all who failed this test. While it has to be owned that some mistakes were made by the Triers, the overwhelming majority of the seven thousand ministers who were ejected were really incompetent, drunkards, blasphemers and the like. By and large, under Cromwell, if a minister was an able man then he could preach according to his understanding, and the church where he was the minister could organise itself as it saw fit. Even the enemies of the Commonwealth were prepared to concede that the ejections were carried out with generous terms, even in ‘gentleness and mercy’, and that the Triers ‘were magnanimous and generous’ in the performance of their duties. And not only were the spiritual conditions good at home; during the Commonwealth years, efforts were also made to spread the gospel overseas. Truly, it was a glorious time, though not without its faults, it

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must be said. Brutality was not eliminated from the methods which some mistaken – though eager – men employed in their missionary works. But taking all in all, God greatly used Oliver Cromwell to the end that much good was done through his life and labours. Notwithstanding the good that was attempted, however, the Presbyterians and some others remained sternly intolerant, since they were entrenched in Constantine thought patterns, and stoutly continued to oppose liberty in religion. But Oliver Cromwell stood his ground, even though he was terribly maligned from all sides. Nor has this reproach died away, even to this very day. It needs to be said again, as Lloyd-Jones once exclaimed: ‘Thank God for Oliver Cromwell!’

One of the consequences of the years of toleration, a toleration which was hated especially by those who longed for a uniform State religion, was the sprouting of sects of all kinds – Seekers, Levellers, Ranters, Diggers, Quakers, Familists, Fifth Monarchy Men, and the rest of them. The devotees of Constantine were appalled at this aspect of the Commonwealth. It was the very thing they had feared and hated. Nevertheless, it was a price worth paying.

Reader, are you outraged at the thought of liberty like this? Do you deplore religious tolerance? Are you – like the Anglicans and Presbyterians of the 1650s – horrified at the ‘crazy patchwork’ it produces? Does it seem an ‘intolerable nightmare’ to you? If you are moving towards a suspicion of tolerance – to put it no higher – perhaps you would not admit it, not even to yourself. But do you reason in a way which tends in that direction? Are you adopting methods which will work inexorably towards it? I have written more fully on this issue in other pages. The danger, I believe, is very real. Be warned! There are some even now who regard Separatism and independency in the churches as one of the greatest evils imaginable, when in truth it is one of the blessings of the New Testament. I ask you to think about these issues. I can imagine my words of warning being dismissed as alarmist claptrap. In reply, I say that the surest way to bring about the recurrence of the nightmare of the past is to deny its possibility in the present.

Of course, error and false sects must be destroyed; *but by spiritual weapons, and by spiritual weapons only*. We have to win the battle for men’s minds and hearts, not force their bodies into conforming to our mould. If our preaching is so poor that we cannot answer and overcome erroneous sects by the use of spiritual methods, but we are tempted to resort to carnal weapons, then we have forfeited the battle before we start! The truth is, some seem to have lost confidence in the only weapons which the New Testament sanctions.

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Religious tolerance means tolerance of those we disagree with. We must allow men to refuse our gospel, and choose another form of religion, or no religion at all, however much we know they are mistaken. Reader, does this horrify you? Beware then, lest you repeat the mistakes made by good men of the past by longing for institutions like a ‘Christian Parliament’, backed by the magistrate and the rule of law, to establish Christianity for you. Such a method is diabolical; Christianity cannot be built in that way. The New Testament doctrine could not be more explicit, and I have tried to speak of it in these pages.

In the days of Commonwealth liberty under Cromwell’s wise government, spiritual activity flourished. In 1651, the General Baptists produced a Confession of Faith, signed by sixty-one representatives. A further Confession followed in 1660. By this time, the General Baptists had grown to one hundred and fifteen churches. At the same time, the Particular Baptists numbered one hundred and thirty-one churches. The extent of the ground gained by Baptists can be gauged by the need the Anglicans felt to introduce a service for the baptism of adults when they compiled their 1662 Prayer Book, and to add the words ‘of infants’ to their original service. The Preface explained this was necessary because of ‘the growth of Anabaptism’, which the compilers attributed to ‘the licentiousness of the late times’. The Prayer Book was still wrong. Adult baptism is as foreign to the Bible as infant baptism; it is only *believer’s* baptism in the New Testament.

The Independents and Congregationalists were virtually joined together by 1658 to reckon about fifty thousand adherents between them.

Cromwell died that same year, 1658 – a momentous event – giving rise to such political confusion it nearly led to chaos within the State. Oliver’s son became the Protector Richard – ‘poor Tumble-down Dick’ – but he was just not up to the job since ‘greatness was not in him’. According to the political fixers of the day, there was only one course open to prevent total disorder; King Charles II had to be recalled from exile. With this in mind, a Parliamentary deputation, accompanied by some leading Presbyterian ministers, including Reynolds, Calamy and Manton, travelled to Breda to parley with Charles. ‘They expressed to the king their own affection and that of their friends towards him, declaring that they were not opposed to a moderate Episcopacy, and praying that indifferent things might not be imposed on them in the worship of God’; that was the burden of their message. Thus, the Presbyterians went cap-in-hand to this defeated and discredited man, Charles Stuart. But things developed pleasantly enough between the parties, and the Scots threw in their encouragement. The upshot was that Parliament, which was Presbyterian once again by this time, was prepared to put Charles on the throne. It was a replay of the old

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game. The Presbyterians hoped the king would establish a uniform Presbyterian State Church of England after all; or so they tried to convince themselves. Previous failures had not dampened their ardour. Charles might have lied last time but this time it would be different. Of course it would! They certainly did not give up very easily, nor had they learned by experience!

And how bitter their experience of Charles had been. Were they blind? No! They chose to ignore what was plainer than the nose upon their face. Did they not remember that in their last encounters with Charles, when they tried to make use of him a decade earlier, ‘he had talked lies, sworn lies, prayed lies, he had eaten lies and drunk them, he had gone to bed with them at night and risen with them in the morning’? They realised exactly what sort of a man he was. It was common talk. For instance, everybody knew he had fathered a string of illegitimate children by a host of different women throughout Europe, dating from his exile before the final Civil War. A frequenter of Parisian brothels, how could this wretch be courted by the Presbyterians? They had taken leave of their senses.

In the high-level conversations which were set in motion, the Independents proposed only one condition in return for their support for the restoration of the monarchy. Having learned of the rightness of tolerance from the Baptists, and having seen the benefits of it under Cromwell, the Independents now demanded liberty to worship as they wished. If that were promised, they would support the return of the king. Charles – never one to hesitate to give his word, though it did not mean a thing – duly obliged, promising ‘liberty to tender consciences’. After all, he who saw Presbyterianism as the best tool he could make use of to get his grip on the two kingdoms of Scotland and England, cynically thought that so valuable an end was ‘worth a covenant or two’. If men wanted his promise, they could have it – for what it was worth! Therefore, all was happily agreed and back to England he sailed to ‘come into his own’. As a token of the changing times, the vessel which carried him across the sea was hastily renamed the *Royal Charles*, seeing its previous title might well be thought offensive to the sensibilities of the king. Quite! Its former name? The *Naseby*! Nobody wanted to be reminded of Naseby, where, in 1645, the New Model Army destroyed the main army of Charles I.

The seeds of disaster were sown in the Declaration of Breda during the early part of April, 1660. To Charles, Anglicanism was second-best after Romanism; by settling for it, he gained as wide political support as possible from Anglicans, Presbyterians, Papists and Uncle Tom Cobley and all, so that the whole country, he and others hoped, might be brought back to Popery. The hints were there at Breda; as months lengthened into years, the hints would become more and more explicit. After all, the

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‘liberty to tender consciences’ over ‘differences of opinion in matter of religion’ was qualified by, ‘which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom’. A pretty wide mandate here, one which spoke of trouble to come.

After making a breakfast of pork, boiled beef and peas, Charles landed at Dover on the 26th of May, 1660, where he accepted a Bible offered to him by the Mayor, saying it was ‘that which he loved above all things in the world’. What mealy-mouthed words. Following ‘these surprising observances’, he was sent off to the capital accompanied by cheers, the pealing of bells, and the roar of guns. On entering London, the ministers presented him with a Bible, and in return ‘he thanked them for it, and told them... that the greatest part of that day’s solemnity he must ascribe to God’s providence, and that he would make that book the rule of his life and government’. It is a wonder the words did not stick in his gullet!

Even so, and regardless of the obvious, the adrenaline pumped through Presbyterian veins; at last, their day had arrived, there were to be no more false dawns! They were ‘in ecstasies’ over their renewed prospects. Some of them were even offered high office within the Church of England, which was nothing other than an undisguised bribery, but to their credit all of them refused except one: Edward Reynolds, who became Bishop of Norwich. However, ‘to soothe and gratify the Presbyterian clergy, several of the most eminent among them were admitted as chaplains-in-ordinary to the king’. The list of these chaplains included Edmund Calamy, Edward Reynolds, Richard Baxter, William Bates and Thomas Manton, besides others. Baxter himself recorded that this was looked upon as:

A reward to the Presbyterians for bringing in the king... For the gratifying and engaging some chief Presbyterians that had brought in the king, by the Earl of Manchester’s means... above ten or twelve of them were designed to be the king’s chaplains-in-ordinary.

He went on to soften the sound of what looked suspiciously like graft by saying: ‘I suppose never a man of them all ever received or expected a penny for the salary of their places’! Perhaps not. They had payment enough; a Presbyterian State Church was just around the corner, or so they thought. They could hardly contain themselves. But they had lost all sense of reality. The truth of the matter was, their prospects were nil!

The necessary discussions now went ahead in earnest as the various parties – the king, the Presbyterians and the Anglicans – jockeyed for the top position in the new order. Somewhat removed from the centre of things, the Independents held aloof for a while, finding themselves in something of a quandary; they could not make up their minds whether or not to join in the negotiations. In contrast, the position of the Baptists was very clear; they were completely out of it all. They never figured in the

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reckoning from the start, but were dismissed out of hand – since they did not hold to a State Church anyway. Nobody bothered with them! In this they discovered that biblical consistency proved its worth, as always.

As the negotiations gathered pace, the Anglicans observed the gap which was appearing in the ranks of the disparate groups opposing them, and prepared themselves to prise it wide open to take maximum advantage. So, even as the Presbyterians were sharpening their political swords once more and getting ready to ram them home, it would be the Anglicans who would strike first, and strike harder!

A story is told concerning a man who tried to give a powder to a bear. The man mixed the powder very carefully, making sure of the correct proportions, then placed it upon a folded paper, and opened his mouth to blow the powder down the bear's throat. He took account of everything, or so he thought. But *he forgot the bear*. Unfortunately for the man, the bear blew first! The Presbyterians were preparing themselves to take control, everything was falling neatly into place, but they forgot... they forgot.

The Savoy Conference was called in 1661, supposedly to try to reach a compromise between the Puritans – who were mostly Presbyterians – and the Anglicans, especially over the *Book of Common Prayer*. The outcome was an utter defeat for the Presbyterians. In fact, things became much worse as a result of this effort to reach a working compromise with their erstwhile enemies, and the clock was put back with a vengeance as the Church swung even further in the papist direction. The Anglicans made sure that certain words were brought back into the Prayer Book deliberately in order to offend the Puritans; words like 'priest' instead of 'minister' for example. Superstitious corruptions and popish vestments were also restored. The Presbyterians might plan, but in reality it was the turn of the High Church party – Anglicans who had become virtual Papists – to get back into the driving-seat. It was they who could see a new day dawning for them, and they were right. They, like the Presbyterians, were in ecstasies, but they had better grounds for it. Indeed they regarded the approaching end of what they called their 'Babylonish exile' with unmitigated joy. They had much to crow about, for their 'Liturgy was beautified', their vestments were restored, extempore prayer was abolished, the old superstitions given back their chief place, and so on. Some 'Restoration'! In short, the Anglicans 'resolved to gratify them (the Presbyterians) in nothing', so that the rules of the Church of England were actually made 'stricter than they had been before the War'.

The fiasco was concluded with the infamous Act of Uniformity of 1662. The Church was uniform alright; but not in the Presbyterian order. By the Act everyone in the State Church was forced to subscribe to certain statements of a diabolical nature. All would-be members of the established

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Church were compelled to agree that the Sovereign is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, supreme in all matters; that the *Book of Common Prayer* contains nothing in it which is contrary to Scripture; and, that the Thirty-Nine Articles are totally agreeable to Scripture. All these and similar statements were completely abhorrent to the Presbyterians. So they ought to have been; they are totally unscriptural.

The Puritans were asked to present their objections to the Episcopalian proposals at the Savoy Conference. They did so, listing those matters which they called ‘flatly sinful’. These included the superstitious practice of the sign of the cross in baptism; the wearing of the surplice; kneeling at the Lord’s supper; baptismal regeneration; open Communion even to those who knew they were not Christians; the pronouncement of absolution for sin for all without regard for the state of the sinner – and that absolution to be total, without condition and fully guaranteed; treating all the dead as Christians during the saying of the burial service; the compulsory use of the Apocrypha; the keeping of Holy Days; and other matters of a similar offensive nature. The Puritans had gained nothing in a hundred years; they were simply repeating the very complaints that had been made to Elizabeth. They got nowhere then; they got nowhere now.

Yes, as before, it was all to no avail. The result was a foregone conclusion. There never was any hope of success. Reformation of the flatly sinful practices was bluntly refused. The Presbyterians were utterly routed. Their demands were dismissed out-of-hand. Far from establishing a uniform Presbyterian Church in England, their intrigues had ensured the State Church was even more rigidly set in the old mould. They had dredged up the old arguments, and, as on every previous occasion, they had been defeated. But this time the Anglican triumph was total. It marked the end of the rule of the Geneva Bible; the so-called Authorised Version of King James would now be supreme. In fact, AV might well be understood to mean Anglican Version – which, as I explained when looking at the Hampton Court Conference, it had been from the very beginning. In short, the Act of Uniformity of 1662 was a complete victory for Laud – though dead – and his party over the Puritans, especially the Presbyterians. At long, long last, even they were forced to realise it. They had tried and tried again; they had used every kind of devious, political manoeuvre they could think of; they had compromised their church life – and done so for decades. And, as the Separatists of the 1580s and onwards had been telling them incessantly, all of it had been doomed to failure right from the start. Thus it proved in 1662. This must stand as a permanent warning to succeeding generations of believers. Compromise with error, joining in political intrigue, looking for a compulsory State religion – these are not the ways Christ builds his church.

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The authorities deliberately chose the 24th of August, 1662, as the date of enforcement of the Act of Uniformity, in order to bring about the maximum amount of suffering for all those who would not conform, by ensuring their biggest financial loss. Nearly two thousand Puritans in the Church of England refused to subscribe to the Act of Uniformity, became Nonconformists and joined the various Separatists outside the State Church. At last, the stream which had divided in the 1580s now became one again as the Church of England was made rigidly uniform once again. What Elizabeth had tried to impose a hundred years before, what James had eagerly set his hand to, what Charles I and Laud had spent their years in putting into place – all came together in 1662.

Thus all the Puritans – apart from the very few who did conform – were united in suffering at last, outside the State Church. Nevertheless, by being thrown out, the Puritans were delivered – in spite of themselves – from coming to power, and so putting into action their intolerant schemes; delivered against their dearest wishes, it must be added, however. If they had won the day, and managed to establish their Church, they would have excluded and persecuted all those who disagreed with them, even in the smallest particular. By the Anglican triumph, the Puritans were spared that blot upon their record at least, for instead of becoming ejectors, they were forced to join the ranks of the ejected. From now on, Puritans and Separatists – Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Independents – were all in the same camp beyond the pale of the establishment, where they all ought to have been seventy years before.

Of the final collapse of State-Puritanism in 1662, it has been said:

[It] remains as a permanent achievement of the Laudian party... A century before, Anglicans had solemnly affirmed that the Church of Rome has erred, the Laudian triumph resulted in a judgement of equal moment – that the Anglican Church was of another spirit than Geneva.

Laud, seemingly defeated by the Puritans in the 1640s, actually triumphed in the end. This is the bitter irony of the attempt to set up a State-imposed Puritanism – it actually ushered in the doctrines and practices of Laud. Of course, neither he nor his king lived to see it, but in 1662 the Church of England shook itself clear of Puritanism and was forever set in his mould. It is so to this day. The Act of Uniformity, though modified somewhat with the passage of time, has never been repealed, so that the State Church is weighed down with its corruptions still; most of those very abuses and superstitions, to which the Puritans vainly objected, are practiced even now. Indeed, they have been added to. Sadly, some Nonconformists, who ought to know better, seem intent on ingratiating themselves with the establishment today, thereby undoing the invaluable work of the struggles for Separatism in the 16th and 17th centuries.

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For all the talk of ‘liberty to tender consciences’, there now followed a period of the most intense suffering for all Nonconformists, as they were persecuted without mercy during the next thirty years. Four laws, known as the Clarendon Code, were enacted; namely, the Corporation Act (1661), the Act of Uniformity (1662), the Conventicle Act (1664) and the Five-Mile Act (1665). Under this tyrannical Code, Nonconformist churches were forced to meet in secret, in barns, cellars and attics, and out-of-the-way places in fields and woods. A network of watchers was required to give warning of approaching enemies in time for escape, often by means of secret passages between houses. And many ingenious schemes were devised to protect preachers when their meetings were broken up, as frequently happened. The Broadmead records tell us how the Baptists, for instance, fared, and very moving details they are.

Charles II, having got his way, for all his pretence to Presbyterianism when it suited his purpose, proved himself to be a debauched and extravagant king, utterly carnal in his ways. He regularly took prostitutes and mistresses on his royal jaunts. This was the man the Anglicans recognised and feted as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England! John Evelyn in his diary recorded the scene at Court on a certain Lord’s day evening. He wrote:

I saw... such a scene of profuse gaming, and the king in the midst of his three concubines, as I had never seen before – luxurious dallying and profaneness.

What a way to spend a Lord’s day, of all days! – especially, as it turned out, his last. Charles would die six days later, smitten down by a fit-like attack.

And if carnality was the king’s pleasure, evasion was his game. He might be the Governor of the Church of England but that did not stop him treating with Rome – covertly. In 1670, at Dover, he even promised the French that he would own Popery in return for their cash. But it was only as he died in 1685 that he became an avowed and open Papist, a religion he had, however, long practiced ‘in secret’. It was while on his death-bed that he was received into the Papal arms by the priest Huddlestone.

Charles was followed by James II. There was nothing secret about his position; he was an undisguised Papist. He reigned from 1685 to 1688, after which the Glorious, Bloodless Revolution put William and Mary on the throne as joint sovereigns. The reign of William of the house of Orange, who was a Calvinist (though staunchly tolerant), ushered in a time of relatively complete religious liberty. This must be qualified however; the toleration was distinctly limited in important respects: Nonconformists were forced to subscribe in a measure to the Thirty-Nine Articles, though they could dissent over specified offensive points; it was still compulsory

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to attend public worship of some kind; public office was only open to Anglicans. In short, Nonconformists found themselves second-class citizens, but that was a huge improvement; at least they were allowed to breathe!

During all the years of suffering up to 1688, however, there was much advance in the continued reformation of church life. Although men like John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, John Howe, Thomas Brookes, John Flavel, John Bunyan and many others were forbidden to preach – at least for a time – they used their enforced silence to good effect. Their massive writings remain of enormous profit to the church of Christ.

Even though the Particular Baptists were persecuted along with the rest, they continued to wage the battle for the further reform of the church, putting their minds to such issues as the membership of a church; should it be closed, only for those who have been baptised as believers by immersion? What about the Lord's supper; should participation be linked to baptism and church membership? Good men differed over these questions. John Bunyan argued for an open table; William Kiffin argued for a closed table. In 1677, the Particular Baptists drew up a Confession of Faith which was based on the Westminster Confession, with adjustments on the points of disagreement between them and the Presbyterians. This Confession allowed the difference of view over an open or closed table to be recorded. Also during these years Benjamin Keach introduced the practice of hymn singing into worship, which led to heated debates among the Particular Baptists. With the coming of toleration, their 1677 Confession was openly approved in 1689, when over a hundred churches were represented by the signatories.<sup>3</sup>

During the age of toleration after 1688, all the churches enjoyed liberty – almost without limit. But now came the time of leanness. However, some churches did remain faithful to Scripture, and some ministers did continue to preach the gospel. Nevertheless, all the various churches, all the groups – the Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists – all declined terribly. And not only in numbers and influence; they decayed spiritually. It was a time of great apostasy. It is frightening to think just how quickly they fell away. The spiritual titans of previous generations were largely replaced by spiritual nondescripts, as nearly all the churches descended headlong into oblivion.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, I have commented on the ‘political correctness’ shown by the Particular Baptists in so closely following the Westminster Confession, and noted the difference with the 1644 Baptist Confession.

<sup>4</sup> Some claim that the Particular Baptists did not so decline.

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The Presbyterians and Independents came very close together for a while during the years 1690-1694, being known as the ‘United Brethren’, forming a sort of ‘tamed Presbyterianism’. However, this unity was soon dissolved in London, breaking down because the Independents were too Calvinistic for the Presbyterians. This departure from Calvinism among the Presbyterians showed itself very rapidly, for within about six short years they were overwhelmed with Arianism and Socinianism to such an extent they did not know whether Christ is God or not. Denying the doctrine of the Trinity, in short, they became the virtual Jehovah’s Witnesses of the late 1600s. So much so, by the early years of the 18th century there were very few orthodox Presbyterian churches left. Thus, by the time that Matthew Henry died in 1714, Presbyterianism had largely sunk into Unitarianism. Is it not amazing? It is terrifying to think of it. The Independents went into oblivion by a different route, as they largely drifted into hyper-Calvinism. Joseph Hussey’s book *God’s Operations of Grace but No Offers of Grace*, published in 1707, had a massive effect for ill.

The General Baptists became very much attracted to the idea of associations of churches, and set up a system of Connexions. Earlier, in 1678, in their *Orthodox Creed*, they had even spoken in Presbyterian terms as far as some aspects of church government go. In this document, they expressed a belief in Councils, to the extent that representatives from the churches meeting in that way do ‘make but one church’ with powers of legislation, superintendency and excommunication ‘in any congregation whatsoever within its own limits, or jurisdiction’. This appalling statement did not go unchallenged among the General Baptists, and it is true to say that the 1678 document is their only statement of the century to give this non-scriptural authority to an organisation over the churches. Nevertheless, this was the way the General Baptists were moving. It would lead to grievous consequences, some of which are becoming evident today. The General Baptists also undervalued their ministers, and began to develop a liking for uneducated preachers. Granted that in times of persecution men might not be able to study and prepare themselves as well as they would like, that is a very different matter to what the General Baptists did. They made an idol of non-education, and gloried in it. They were rapidly infected with Arianism similar to the Presbyterians, became Unitarians and virtually died out. The General Baptists of today come from a totally different line which started with Dan Taylor’s New Connexion of General Baptists, formed by a handful of churches in 1770.

In contrast, the Particular Baptists wanted to improve the educational standard of their ministers. They also emphasised the independent nature of the churches. Differences developed among them over the Lord’s supper, however, in that many churches had a membership restricted to

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baptised believers only, but practiced some form of open table, while others adopted a strict approach – a closed membership and a closed table. In addition, during the years of toleration the Particular Baptists began to examine the place of the law of God in the life of the believer, and some became Antinomians; that is, against law. Furthermore, John Skepp, largely influenced by Hussey, introduced hyper-Calvinism among them in 1710, and he was followed by John Brine, then by John Gill, and many others. The gospel offer was not preached; in fact, the very term was derided. Christ was not presented in all his glory as willing and seeking to save sinners, all sinners just as they are, dead in their sins. A work of preparation is needed, so it was said; only ‘awakened’ or ‘sensible’ sinners could be called to Christ. And since the preacher did not know which of his hearers were in that state, he held back from giving a pressing and earnest invitation to all and sundry lest he should ‘trespass upon the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit’. Naturally, this brought a severe bondage to gospel preachers, so much so, that if Andrew Fuller had not been used to rescue them in 1785, with his book, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, then ‘the [Particular] Baptists would have become a perfect dunghill in society’.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Church of England, Laud’s High Church policies were rampant right from 1662. Latitudinarianism, in which revelation was ousted by reason, also reared its fiendish head. Instead of Scripture as the basis of faith and practice, the power of the human mind became the authority in religion. This developed into Deism – a religious system which is anti-revelation, with no belief in the supernatural, or miracles, the resurrection, or the sovereignty of God in providence. Under this kind of regime, a spiritual, saving faith was out of the question, and Christianity became reduced to a matter of genteel decency at best. The deductions of the human intellect replaced the biblical revelation of God’s mind as the touchstone of religion. During the reign of Queen Anne, 1702-1714, High Church Anglicanism and Deism flourished to such an extent in the State Church, that it was often impossible to tell whether an Anglican preacher was ‘Confucian, or Moslem, or Christian’. And it was said there were three degrees of preaching – ‘dull, duller, dullest’.

The effect, on the nation’s moral life, of all this tragic decline in the spirituality of the churches was devastating. Robbery and murder were commonplace, drunkenness was rife, with drinking-houses able to advertise enough gin to make the customer ‘drunk for a penny, dead-drunk for twopence’, with a straw bed thrown in. In 1735, London distillers

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<sup>5</sup> For more on these themes, see my *The Gospel Offer is Free; Particular Redemption and The Free Offer; Septimus Sears*; and my forthcoming books on Sandemanianism and on the law.

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produced 5.4 million gallons of the lethal fluid – a gallon for each man, woman and child in the land. So widespread was the gin-craze, the nation nearly drank itself into oblivion through alcoholic poisoning; many consumed pints of the liquor daily. A vicious economic cycle was in place: Parliament encouraged the gin trade because distilling pushed up the price of corn, which in turn increased the agricultural profits for landowners who controlled Parliament. Hogarth captured the depravity in his *Gin Lane*; a baby falls to its death from the arms of its drunken mother who wears an idiotic grin, while a second infant has been impaled on a spit by another drunkard. ‘A more naked, a more careless degradation was never seen in the towns of this country. Not only were the vendors of drink amassing their infamous fortunes: the pawnbrokers and undertakers were equally busy and equally prosperous’. No wonder three-quarters of babies died in infancy. Cruelty, barbarity, public brawls between women, carnality and slavery became the hall-marks of society. Besides which, it was an age of gambling where multitudes squandered what little they had on the frequent State Lotteries.

Good men did try to stem the tide of sin. Various learned books were written, and high-minded societies were set up to attempt some kind of reform of public manners. All to no avail. The country was sinking into the abyss as a consequence of the lack of powerful preaching of the gospel. Gospel-preaching powerless? It was becoming virtually extinct! The marks of God’s judgement were evident on every hand. The churches had largely given up God and his word, and it seemed as though God had given them up (Rom. 1:18-32). Are we not witnessing something similar today? If it is not already upon us, we are certainly rapidly approaching such a hideous prospect, I fear.

But... in 1699, John Howe had preached a sermon in which he declared: ‘Atheism, scepticism, infidelity, worldliness and formality, have quite swallowed up our religion’. That was certainly true. Nevertheless, he did not leave it there. He said: ‘But though it should seem generally to have expired, let us believe it shall revive’. John Howe’s ‘but’ was important. But there was another ‘but’...

But you, O LORD... will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favour her, yes, the set time, has come (Ps. 102:12-13). O LORD, revive your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy (Hab. 3:2).

In 1735, a young undergraduate at Oxford, a member of the Church of England, who had been under severe conviction of sin for a considerable length of time, was soundly converted. Of the experience he later wrote:

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God was pleased to remove the heavy load, to enable me to lay hold of his dear Son by a living faith, and by giving me the Spirit of adoption, to seal me even to the day of everlasting redemption. Oh! with what joy – joy unspeakable – even joy that was full of and big with glory, was my soul filled, when the weight of sin went off, and an abiding sense of the pardoning love of God, and a full assurance of faith, broke in upon my disconsolate soul! Surely it was the day of mine espousals – a day to be had in everlasting remembrance! At first my joys were like a spring tide, and overflowed the banks!

That young man was George Whitefield. God's time had come. One of the men whom God would use to preach the gospel to bring multitudes out of sin and degradation, had now been converted.

A little later, so was another. On the morning of Wednesday, the 24th of May, 1738, an unconverted, despondent but seeking, Anglican minister, one who had been a missionary to the North American Indians though utterly destitute of saving faith himself, lighted upon a verse of Scripture, which he received as an encouragement from God to his soul. It said: 'You are not far from the kingdom of God' (Mark 12:34). That evening he was to attend a meeting in Aldersgate Street, where a man was to read the preface of Luther's Commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans. The Anglican minister did not want to go. Nevertheless, go he did. And he listened. He never forgot what he heard, nor what happened to him. Of the experience he later wrote:

I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

The Anglican missionary who was converted in that way was John Wesley.

These two men, George Whitefield and John Wesley, were the principal instruments God would use to turn 'the world upside down' (Acts 17:6) by the preaching of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was time for the spiritual desert in England, and elsewhere, to 'rejoice and blossom as the rose'. Blossom? Why it would 'blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing' (Isa. 35:1-2). The Great Awakening had come.

Oh, that such 'times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord' again (Acts 3:19). And may they come upon us and our churches. And may they come soon. 'How long, LORD? Will you be angry forever? O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry against the prayer of your people? How long, LORD? Will you hide yourself for ever? Return, O LORD! How long? LORD, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph? O LORD, how long shall I cry, and you will not hear? O LORD of hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem and on

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the cities of Judah, against which you were angry...?' (Ps. 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 90:13; 94:3; Hab. 1:2; Zech. 1:12).

Reader, I shall be more than gratified if this feeble effort of mine in trying to retell the history of the battle for the church during the years 1517-1644, and pointing out some of the things we can learn from it, does anything to further such an end.

## *Last Words*

Remind them of these things

2 Timothy 2:14

*Church life, not merely church order – gains between 1517 and 1644 – lessons from this history – God is sovereign – we are responsible – suffering is essential – the scriptural importance of the church – Constantine a disaster – we must not put our trust in men – we must think of the generations to come – the church is God’s church*

Reader, I hope I have made my meaning clear. Throughout this book, I have been contending for the *life* of the church, its spirit and vitality, not merely its form, order and pattern of government. Oh, that we could discover more and more of the sheer joy of belonging to one of the churches of Christ. That having been said, I do argue that the life of the church is affected by its pattern and order; very much so. To say otherwise, is to contradict the New Testament. Of course, good men can disagree strongly about church order – they do! – and because of that, until the end of the age we will need different churches, no doubt. Nevertheless, while there may be honourable differences of judgement on order, should we not all agree on the life of the church?

The Particular Baptists in the 1640s, I submit, were second to none in this regard; their church *life* was of a very high calibre indeed. And I say that they were in that position partly at least because of their emphasis upon New Testament order for their churches; certainly not in spite of it.

I have tried to be practical and down-to-earth throughout these pages. I want to be the same here. Let me illustrate why I say that church order affects church life. I remember a conversation I had with a Reformed (Presbyterian) minister, during which he explained that there were four hundred members in ‘his’ church. I asked him how many attended the prayer meeting. He replied, forty. Forty out of four hundred! Reader, the apostles simply would not recognise or countenance 10% attendance at the prayer meeting. The minister himself was obviously not happy with it; to put it bluntly, he was embarrassed. He said that he felt his main trouble was an unregenerate elder. All he could do was to wait for him to die!

This sort of thing would be impossible in any church which demanded a regenerate membership, and a life consistent with that profession. Is there no such procedure as discipline? Is it good enough to get 10% attendance at a spiritual meeting? The point I am making is, the problem in that church was a direct consequence of its order. The fact is, it baptised infants

and received them as members. It did not demand evidence of regeneration before membership, at least not in their case. I admit that Baptist churches can have similar offensive defects – but only where they act inconsistently with their order and principles. Some churches need to live up to their stated articles; others need to change them. Presumably in the church in question the problem will get worse if the membership increases as more infants are baptised and added to it, unless they are converted. The very order and pattern of that church is directly contributing to its unhealthy life.

I know that many will think I should have not wasted my time in dredging up all the old arguments from the 16th and 17th centuries, and that I have done the people of God a great disservice by opening old divisions when the need is for greater unity ‘on the essentials’. (One difficulty with that is, it is impossible to define biblically what are ‘the essentials’). I may well be castigated by those who believe, say, that we ought to do as Whitefield did in the 1740s, and leave aside the debates of the 1640s on church order, and concentrate on a revival of evangelism instead. I agree, if the debates are to be concerned with church order, and that is all. But, as I have said, I have been pleading for something far more important than a debate about order; I have been pleading for a long, hard look at present-day church *life* along with, and through, its order. And that is a very different proposition.

Let me emphasise the point I am making by quoting from Joseph Tracy’s record of the Great Awakening in New England under Whitefield and Edwards. He drew some important lessons from it; not least, its effect on church order and life. His comments make salutary reading. I have already referred to Edwards’ struggle at Northampton, Massachusetts. Tracy spoke of the good and valuable influence of Separatist principles on Edwards at the time. This must not be forgotten. Now, many in those days said the Separatists were ‘censorious’ to demand marks of regeneration before church membership, but Tracy rightly dismissed this criticism as sheer ‘cant’. Quite right! Such fault-finding is humbug. What is more, Tracy argued, the experience in New England showed that an insistence on a regenerate church membership is far from trivial; in truth, it has a vital part to play. He was right. It is no mole-hill pretending to be an Everest, even though some in our generation think it is. Tracy went as far as to claim: ‘The future destiny of each of the churches seems to have depended more on its treatment of this question, than on any other single event’. What an assertion! It is as strong as anything I have said in these pages. Even so, I think I can hear the criticism which will be levelled at my repeating of the Separatist arguments, the Baptist arguments – no! the *scriptural* arguments – for church order. I will be accused of being

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‘divisive, uncharitable, censorious, guilty of invading God’s prerogative’, and so on.

It has all been said before, time and again. The censures were wheeled out in New England, and their accumulated dust removed, so that they could be laid at the door of those who tried to get back to the New Testament. Tracy dismissed the censures; and so do I. What is more, his observations and conclusions warrant the closest attention. He summed up the consequence of playing down the call for a regenerate church membership. Which was? Those who did not bother their heads about it, or did not face the difficulties of enforcing godly church membership ended up with mixed churches, certainly. In fact, they started there! Tracy went much further. He claimed that they ended up with ‘churches’ which excluded nobody for any error of doctrine, and excluded nobody for any sinful practice; that church membership disappeared in some places, and indiscriminate communion followed. In the end, ‘the churches, as distinct from the congregations, no longer exist’, he said. Reader, be warned!

The point is not only illustrated by what happened in New England during the 1740s; it has scriptural precedent. When Joshua was about to die, he preached a sermon to Israel, a sermon of immense importance. In one passage, Joshua 23:6-13, he commanded the Israelites to watch themselves very carefully. He told them that Israel living in Canaan was one thing – there was no danger in that – but if they allowed the Canaanites to live in Israel, the Israelites would be ruined. As long as Israel lived in Canaan but separate from it, as long as Israel was careful to obey God in every detail of his word, as long as Israel did not adopt pagan ideas or associate with pagan religion, all would be well with them. But if Israel ever mixed itself with Canaanites, or copied their methods, God would make sure the Canaanites would become ‘snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish’ (Josh. 23:13). Even so, Israel ignored or deliberately flouted God’s command, they paid no attention to his warning, and the consequences were dire (Judg. 3:5-8). The principle applies to the church. It applies to us and our churches. It applies to you and your church. The church in the world is one thing; the world in the church is quite another:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:... ‘Come out from among them and be separate’, says the Lord. ‘Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters’, says the LORD Almighty. Therefore, having these promises,

beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1).

And there is a further point about the debates of the 16th and 17th centuries, a point which needs to be remembered. The greatest cause of all the controversies about church order in those years – the one main trouble – was that the vast majority clung to the doctrines of Constantine. *If only* Manz and his friends could have worshipped free of State interference in the 1520s; *if only* Browne and Harrison had been allowed to form a Congregational church in the 1580s; *if only* Thacker and Coppin had not been hanged for reading Browne's books; *if only* Penry could have died in old age, surrounded by his wife and children instead of being throttled at Southwark; *if only* Johnson, Ainsworth, Smyth and Robinson could have worshipped in England; *if only* Kiffin and the others could have practiced believer's baptism unmolested; *if only...* Ah! But those in power – the Papists, the Reformers, the Anglicans, and eventually the Puritans – would not let them, would they? No! And it was those in power – the lovers of Constantine – who were largely responsible for prolonging the endless debates on church order, and it was they who were forever dreaming up ways in which that order could be imposed on the masses. And this includes, not least, the discussions at Westminster.

Many radicals were certainly argumentative and changed their minds, it is true. But the Particular Baptists, for instance, though far from perfect, in the main were getting on with church life in the 1640s, leaving those in political power to wrangle endlessly over details of order; it was the Puritans who were trying to form a monolithic State Church which would embrace all and sundry. I do not suggest that the Puritans – the Presbyterians in particular – had no church life worthy of the name; that would be utterly foolish, a slur and a lie. But the seemingly endless and arid deliberations on order at Westminster, schemes to impose uniformity on all the people, the stream of Parliamentary Ordinances, the various Acts of Uniformity of 1549, 1552, 1559 and 1662, and all the rest of the panoply of Constantine, never came from those who believed in voluntary religion; that much is certain.

I realise that in the kingdom of glory there will be no quarrels over church order. Of course not. But we are not there yet! And seeing we have to live the rest of our lives on earth, we need to form churches and run them in some way or another. Whitefield might not worry his head overmuch about church order while he got on with preaching for conversions; nevertheless, somebody had to be concerned about it. What kind of spiritual life were the converts to enjoy – or endure – for the next forty or fifty years of their life on earth? It is no use talking in highfalutin and theoretical terms; we have got to be practical men. Churches have to be

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organised. For us not to reform them, to do nothing, not to think about the difficulties of our churches, *is* to reform them, and to reform them disastrously. Doing nothing, letting things drift, is not the solution. Let Christians disagree about order if we have to – in all things we are all more or less wrong, all of us, no doubt – but let us settle for nothing less than what we see as New Testament *life* in our churches, whatever their order. And I am sure that when men sincerely try to get New Testament life in the church, they will soon discover that the New Testament order for the church plays a very important part in their quest. I put it to you, the advances made by the Particular Baptists were real gains, not only in church order, but in its life; they were advances (forgive my linguistic solecism) back towards the New Testament. They built upon the progress made by others in previous years, and they built well.

So we come to the end of my account; but not to the end of the struggle – the battle to reform the church. As long as time shall be, that battle will never be over. But we do come to the end of my book. And we have travelled a long and blood-stained road from the monk with his nails at Wittenberg in 1517 to the Particular Baptists and their Confession of Faith in 1644, have we not? What a journey it has been! What glorious gains were made for the church along the way! How much was accomplished in those years! Things were very different in 1644 as compared with 1517. Think of Luther, how amazed he would have been if he could have seen the church one hundred and twenty years after Wittenberg. What changes he would have observed!

I have finished my account with the emergence of the Particular Baptists and their first Confession in 1644, but I do not pretend that they were perfect. Nor do I imply that it was only their churches which showed a range of excellent improvements when compared to corruptions of the Papacy in 1517. But I do say that it was only the Particular Baptists which showed all the following features:

- Scripture was the sole authority in their churches in 1644, not the Fathers, tradition and the pope, as it had been in the one Catholic Church in 1517.
- Christ was king in their churches, whereas the pope had been the Supreme Pontiff over all the Church in 1517. The Particular Baptists were firm advocates of Christ's unique right to rule his people by his Spirit through his word.
- The New Testament was the pattern, the rule and order of their churches and the way they saw the advance of the gospel in the world – not the theories based on Constantine. I do not say they

perfectly attained their goal, but the New Testament, and only the New Testament, was their pattern.

- Their churches were free of State control in 1644, whereas the Church and State were one in 1517.
- They preached the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace, not salvation by works and merits through man's free will.
- They baptised believers only, and that by immersion, in place of the almost universal practice of the baptismal regeneration of infants by sprinkling in 1517. And they accepted as members of their churches none but baptised believers who lived consistently with their profession.
- The simple, symbolic remembrance of Christ in his Supper had replaced the abomination of the Mass.
- Religion was a voluntary matter for them, not something to be enforced by kings and parliaments and magistrates and armies. Spiritual discipline was a church matter and the concern of the church alone. The means to be used were spiritual; not carnal, such as prison, the sword and the stake.
- Instead of one all-embracing Church, their churches were separate and independent.

These gains were large gains, immeasurable gains, biblical gains. They were vital achievements, obtained at enormous cost, bought at a great price. Men, women and children had given their life-blood for them. These gains are our inheritance, they belong to us. Yet we today are in grave danger of undervaluing them and letting them slip through our fingers. We are wasting this treasure, and if something is not done about it we shall lose altogether the precious deposit handed down to us. If our present decadence continues – and I do not mean decadence in society, but in the churches – if this degeneration goes on, we shall find ourselves back in 1517 all over again. And if it goes on at the present rate, it will not be long before we find ourselves enslaved once more. One day soon, we shall wake up to find that the manacles have been fastened around our wrists – tightened as we have been dozing – and the key will have been thrown away. And the spiritual battle will have to be fought all over again to recover the ground we have madly and sinfully undervalued and let slip. It is said that it takes three generations to see to a business; the first to start it, the second to build it up, and the third to waste it. If we are 'the third generation', we shall have to answer for it. 'Easy come, easy go' is not a Christian attitude.

Can we not learn from this history before it is too late? What lessons should stay with us? If we choose not to remember, we shall forget; if we

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forget, we shall lose what was won for us, we shall lose our gospel liberty. And if we lose that, we shall have to fight the battle all over again.

*First*, the Bible tells us plainly that God is sovereign in all things, over all men, and in all affairs. This principle has been proved time and again in this history. God is in control; not popes, kings, bishops or magistrates. God works all things after the counsel of his will, and every event takes place at his appointment, ‘in due time’ (Rom. 5:6).

*Secondly*, though God is sovereign, we still have to do our part. God’s sovereignty does not do away with our responsibility to work. Indeed, it is one vital aspect of the sovereign will of God that we must work for him, and work with him. It is because Christ could say that ‘all authority has been given to me’ that he went on to command his disciples to ‘go therefore’ and do something in his name (Matt. 28:18-20). We have to ‘work out... for it is God who works in you’ (Phil. 2:12-13). This principle has been amply demonstrated in the lives of the godly men and women we have thought about. How they worked for Christ. What wonderful things they accomplished in his name and for his cause. They were ‘God’s fellow-workers’ (1 Cor. 3:9), ‘workers together with him’ (2 Cor. 6:1). They were labourers, not loiterers; soldiers on a spiritual battle-field, not sunbathers on a sandy beach; holy warriors, not fun-lovers in a holiday camp. They are ‘a cloud of witnesses’ to us, surely. Do they not challenge us in our complacency? Do they not stir us to carry out the advice given by the Philistines, raising it far above their pagan notions: ‘Be strong and conduct yourselves like men... conduct yourselves like men, and fight!’ (1 Sam. 4:9)?

Courage is needed; courage to be lonely with God and lonely for God; courage not to compromise the truth of God. The hour is calling for men and women who will buy the truth at any price and sell it at none (Prov. 23:23); indeed the hour is demanding men and women who will sell all that they have to buy the truth (Matt. 13:44-46), saints who will never trade it away. No! not for the whole world (Matt. 16:24-26). This is the need. Yet we are seeing many today who emulate Esau – they will give up the truth for something far less than ‘the whole world’; ‘one morsel of food’ will do for them (Heb. 12:16)! Judas parted with Christ for money (Matt. 26:15); Herod sold John the Baptist to save face (Mark 6:25-28); Pilate did it for popularity (Mark 15:15); Demas for the love of the world (2 Tim. 4:10). We need men and women who know that Christ alone has – and is – the truth, men and women who will never leave him (John 6:66-69) whatever the threat or the inducement (Acts 4:18-20).

A.W.Tozer put the point in his own trenchant way. He said:

The church at this moment needs men, the right kind of men, bold men. The talk is that we need revival... and God knows we must have [it]; but God will not revive mice. He will not fill rabbits with the Holy Ghost! We languish for men who feel themselves expendable in the warfare of the soul, who cannot be frightened by threats of death because they have already died to the allurements of this world. Such men will be free from the compulsions that control and squeeze weaker men. This kind of freedom is necessary if we are to have [preachers] in our pulpits again instead of mascots. These free men will serve God and mankind from motives too high to be understood by the rank and file of religious entertainers who today shuttle in and out of the sanctuary. They will make no decisions out of fear, take no course out of a desire to please, accept no service for financial considerations, perform no religious act out of mere custom; nor will they allow themselves to be influenced by the love of publicity or the desire for reputation. The true church... leaders heard from God, they knew their Lord's will and did it. [The] people followed them – sometimes to triumph, oftener to insults and public persecution – and their sufficient reward was the satisfaction of being right in a wrong world!

*Thirdly*, the Bible tells us that the way of Christ is the way of suffering. A great many Scriptures speak of it. Indeed, the gospel is advanced through suffering; it is God's will that it should be so. It is trite to say that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, but it is nonetheless true. The church gains through loss. Paul, who suffered dreadful trials for the sake of Christ, stated this truth very clearly when he said: 'But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel' (Phil. 1:12). He said God had appointed him to be a preacher, an apostle and a teacher, and that this led inevitably to suffering (2 Tim. 1:11-12). As he put it: 'For this reason I also suffer...' (2 Tim. 2:8-10). Christ will gain the victory over all his enemies; he will make his church to triumph. But it will be by the path of suffering; *there is no other way* (2 Tim. 4:5).

This principle has been abundantly shown time and time again as we have witnessed how much the saints of the 16th and 17th centuries endured for Christ, what agonies they faced for him and his cause. They certainly reached their crown and glory by way of the cross. It is always so. The church can never be fashionable and popular if it remains true to the gospel. We aim to please God, not men (Gal. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:15). If any Christian, any minister, any church has found a way to avoid suffering, it must mean they have forsaken Christ and the gospel, for 'all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution' (2 Tim. 3:12). If suffering for Christ is a test of spirituality and orthodoxy – and it is – how spiritual are we? How godly are we? Do we want the world to *like* us and our churches? The more conformed to Christ we are, and the more our churches recover the New Testament life, pattern and order, the more the

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world will hate us (John 15:18-19). The words of Christ stand to this day, and, whatever some modern professors may think, there is no way round them. He said: ‘Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets’ (Luke 6:26).

*Fourthly*, let us remember the emphasis which Scripture puts upon the church. The saints I have written about certainly understood this point, and they acted upon it. The Scriptures speak of two aspects of the church; the universal church, all the elect of all ages, and a local or particular church. The most frequent way the New Testament speaks of the church is in its local sense – overwhelmingly so. Many of the men and women in this history appreciated this and, while they did think of the universal church, they realised that their great concern and responsibility was for the local, particular, independent church; that is, the church – the body of believers – to which *they* belonged, and with whom *they* worshipped and served God. It was the purification and improvement of *their* church life which they thought so much about. Now this is a biblical principle. This is what all believers must do. *We* must do it. We have been challenged, surely, by the lives of the believers we have considered, to see that one of our greatest responsibilities in life is the reformation of our local church. This means it is our duty to restore the church as closely as we can to the New Testament.

Since disorders and corruptions come in the best of churches, we must be ever reforming ourselves. A church that is not reforming in the sense of going back to Scripture is no church at all. As John Owen put it:

I know of no other reformation of any church, or anything in a church, but the reducing of it to its primitive institution, and the order allotted to it by Jesus Christ... And when any society or combination of men... is not capable of such a reduction and renovation... I profess I cannot look on such a society as a church of Christ.

Owen said a church that could not reform itself according to the New Testament was no church. I would cut deeper. A church that *will not* so reform itself is no church. It is our spiritual duty to seek a Reformed and reforming church, to join this kind of church, and to do all we can to further its continued reformation.

*Fifthly*, another very important lesson we have learned is that Constantine was a disaster. The concept of a State Church, or any kind of union of State and Church, or the mixture of religion and politics, is wrong-headed. It is far worse, it is sinful. It is totally unscriptural. When Constantine’s theories are put into practice, even by good men, they always – always – end in disaster. We cannot Christianise society; we cannot make pagan countries into Christian countries; we cannot raise churches by Acts of Parliament;

we cannot impose the gospel on sinners by politics or the sword. It cannot be done. We must not attempt it. It is nonsense, a dangerous nonsense, to think otherwise, seeing both the battle and our arms are spiritual. The church of Christ is separate from the world, completely distinct from it. The two are diametrically opposed to each other (Jas. 4:4). The world needs to be converted, not Christianised. It is only the church that can be reformed; the world must be regenerated. We are in the world but not a part of it (John 17:14-16). ‘We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one’ (1 John 5:19). The devotees of Constantine mix the world and the church together – or try to – over and over again. It always is an appalling mistake. We must not repeat it. But there is a real risk that it will be done. In truth, it is happening already. It has never stopped!

In bald contrast to the expectations of the friends of Constantine, the history we have traced has shown us the practical outworking of God’s election as declared in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. It is the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, the nothings and the nobodies of the world whom God has chosen; it is not many of the wise, the mighty or the somebodies who are called. God has ‘chosen the poor of this world’ (Jas. 3:5). Let us never forget this. We do forget very easily, and it costs us dear. We must reflect upon these things, keep them in mind and consider them. In this way the Lord will give us understanding (2 Tim. 2:7, NIV, and NKJV footnote). If we do not think seriously about these matters, we shall expose ourselves to grave danger. True churches will never be part of the establishment. When the bigwigs of society fawn upon the church, it means ruin for the church, it spells nothing but disaster. Let us not crave the world’s approval. If we are true to Christ, we shall always be part of ‘the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things’ (1 Cor. 4:13). If anyone becomes a Christian in the hope of making himself liked by a pagan society, he must be out of his mind. If he thinks he can have Christ and the world, he is grossly mistaken. And those preachers who are misleading sinners by teaching them that they can, are teaching diabolical rubbish. They ought to heed the words of Christ: ‘Whoever does not bear his cross, and come after me cannot be my disciple... sit down first and count the cost... whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple’ (Luke 14:27-33). When worldly men treat the church as its plaything, and the church likes it and encourages it, then it is in deep trouble. In those circumstances we cannot be standing for the gospel (Luke 6:26). We are an offence to God.

If we are a friend of the world, we are an offence to God (Jas. 4:4). But if we are pleasing to God, then we are an offence to the world. There is no way of avoiding ‘offence’. Offence? Offence! What a word to sound in

many churches today! We live in times when making ‘the offence of the cross to cease’ has become a work of art. What am I talking about? Inclusivism. Inclusivism? What’s that? It is perhaps the besetting curse of the churches today – inclusivism.<sup>1</sup> Inclusivism is a sovereign way of avoiding gospel offence. The offence of the gospel! Paul closed his letter to the Galatians, speaking of how men in his day tried to get round ‘the offence of the cross’ to avoid persecution (Gal. 6:12-13). They have been at it ever since. Paul would have none of it (Gal. 6:14-15). Neither must we. We must walk in his steps (Gal. 6:16).

*Sixthly*, we have been reminded, surely, that men are but fallible mortals. We have read of many excellent men and women in this history, those who did great things for God. But all of them without exception failed. The best, the most godly of men, is a sinner yet. The most advanced and mature believer is but a creature of a day. ‘He knows nothing yet as he ought to know’ (1 Cor. 8:2). ‘Great men are not always wise’ (Job 32:9). After all, of a man it can be said: ‘Whose breath is in his nostrils; for of what account is he?’ (Isa. 2:22). We must not put our trust in princes ‘nor in a son of man’ (Ps. 146:3). Our confidence, our trust, must be in the Lord ‘because the foolishness of God is wiser than men’ (1 Cor. 1:25). ‘Certainly every man at his best state is but vapour’ (Ps. 39:5). We have but one ‘Teacher, the Christ’ (Matt. 23:8). In short: ‘And do not be called teachers; for one is your Teacher, the Christ’ (Matt. 23:10). ‘And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day’ (Isa. 2:11).

Yet, despite this weight of Scripture, we have seen how Christians can so easily and frequently exalt and follow men, with consequent great harm. We dare not make idols of men, not men of the past nor men of the present; we must not put our preachers and teachers upon a pedestal. Can we not learn from this history the folly of such a course? It is sinful. God has declared that he will not give his glory to another (Isa. 42:8). No! not even to his servants, the ones whom he has used so signally (Isa. 48:11)! All boasting about men, all pride in ministers is wrong. It is carnal. ‘Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers...’ Yes, only ministers. God uses ministers, but ‘neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase’ (1 Cor. 3:4-7). God! It is God only who must receive the praise and honour (1 Cor. 1:31). It is God, he who has spoken in Scripture, who must be followed, and he only. None of us should ‘be puffed up on behalf of one against the other’ (1 Cor. 4:6). To make our preachers into virtual gods and to boast about them is patently a sin. But it is done, time and again. John Livingstone’s words stand as a warning to us. He wrote, in 1671: ‘Our ministers were our glory, and I fear our idol, and

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<sup>1</sup> See the extended note, ‘Inclusivism’, in my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

the Lord has stained the pride of our glory'. Reader, if we repeat the error, we shall pay dearly for it.

*Seventhly*, we must always bear in mind that what we do affects the generations following on behind us – for good or ill. We leave our footprints in the sand. To change the figure: We are building either a glorious spiritual heritage for our children and their children, or piling up a spiritual debt for them to pay off. Will the rising generation inherit a spiritual fortune from us, or will they be bankrupt? Which is it? It is not good enough to say that we are insignificant, that what we do or do not do is of no consequence in the great scheme of things. It is simply not true. We are responsible. We are accountable to God, and we shall have to answer for all we have done (2 Cor. 5:10), including our secret thoughts (Rom. 2:16). We shall also have to answer for what we have *not* done.

The history we have been looking at is the account of the doings of men and women just like ourselves. This ought to be a truism. They were as weak as we are. They had their illnesses to cope with. They had their temptations to wrestle with. Things were no easier for them; a great deal harder, in fact. We know that the great men and women of the Bible were but sinful creatures like ourselves (Jas. 5:17), but see what they attempted for God. Please do not sit back and let the church fall into ruin because you feel you cannot do anything about it. Be up and doing for God. Look for his help. When things go hard with you, remember Tyndale. 'My God... O my God, fail me not; my last hope is in thee', he cried. Recall how he purposed within himself: 'If I could but' do something for God and his cause, he said. He not only purposed and prayed; he got on with it. And he was just one of many. Luther, Manz, Calvin, Hooper, Cartwright, Browne, Penry, Smyth, Jacob, Kiffin and all the rest of them. What a noble army has gone before us; not forgetting the women and children. And what they did lives on, even to our own time. Please, my reader, I implore you, think of the following generations. I know we must not seek fame (Jer. 45:5); therefore let us forget ourselves. But let us try to do something for God, however small it might be. Be encouraged by my account of thousands of ordinary folk who put their hand to the plough and did not look back (Luke 9:62). 'Go and do likewise' (Luke 10:37).

*Eighthly*, and finally, the church is God's church. Christ said: 'I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it' (Matt. 16:18). No, they shall not; they cannot. They did not prevail all down the Dark Ages, even though it certainly looked as though Satan had defeated Christ. No! God arose and scattered his enemies (Ps. 68:1-3). The cause of God will advance in the world (Dan. 2:35,44; Rev. 5:9; 7:9). It may be that other parts of the world will see God's blessing, while we in the west

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decline. Seasons of darkness will come, but even so the gates of Hades will never be able to thwart God in his purposes – which is to make Christ glorious among all peoples, if not in mercy then in judgement (Phil 2:9-10).

In 1517, God appeared among his people again, and began to restore the church out of her ruined condition. Then, during the years of struggle which followed, Christ continued to build his church, repairing her walls and raising her ramparts. The gates of Hades did not prevail.

And though the present days are dark, and the church is tottering once again, and her enemies are clambering over her defences – even invited inside by some naive souls – nevertheless, let us trust in the Lord. We must. His word stands firm. It is *his* church. Christ ‘loved the church and gave himself for it’, and one day he will ‘present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish’ (Eph. 5:25-27). May we be found ‘looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (Tit. 2:13). As Paul boasted of the church of the Thessalonians, may we live now so as to receive such an accolade as this in the last day:

We ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgement of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, when he comes, in that day, to be glorified in his saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:4-12).

I conclude the way I said I would in the Introduction. *Battle For The Church*, I said. How do you read that sentence?, I asked. Well, reader, how do you read it? Is it a statement? Or is it an exhortation? Have you been reading a book of history – *how* the battle for the church was fought? Or have you been reading an exhortation – *how you ought to fight that battle?*

May Acts 16:5 be true of our churches: ‘So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily’. To that end, let us ‘watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong’ (1 Cor. 16:13). May we

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‘contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 3).

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‘And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God’ (Heb. 11:32 – 12:2).

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This list is *far* from exhaustive, but in hope that a quarter of a loaf...

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Cramp pp264,267,269-270,277; Shakespeare pp180-183,186-187; Underwood pp59-60,72-73,76,86; Ramsbottom pp12-13,29-30; Hill pp304-305,372-373,428; Lumpkin pp153-155,162,167-168; Horton Davies p69.

### **Postscript**

Hill pp35-36,82-84,171-172,264-266,273-282,310-311; Iain Murray: ‘The Scots’ pp19-21,40; Fraser xxi; pp191,236,265; Wedgwood; Lloyd-Jones: *Puritans* pp58,64; Nuttall and Chadwick pp54-55,96-97,99,258-261; Dearmer pp118,236; Stowell pp322-323; Kenyon p108; Baxter p146; Rice p68; Martin pp101,156; Dallimore Vol.1 pp77,186.

### **Last Words**

Tracy pp406,411; Tozer Aug. 11th; Lloyd-Jones: *Puritans* p91; Iain Murray: ‘The Scots’ p36.

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## *List of Dates*

### **1509-1547**

- HENRY VIII**
- 1517 Martin Luther nails his theses to the door at Wittenberg
  - 1521 Henry burns Luther's works
  - 1525 First Anabaptist church formed in Zurich
  - 1526 William Tyndale's New Testament reaches England
  - 1527 Felix Manz the first Anabaptist martyr
  - 1534 Henry's Act of Supremacy
  - 1535 First Anabaptist executed in England
  - 1536 John Calvin settles in Geneva
  - 1539 Henry's Act of Six Articles

### **1547-1553**

- EDWARD VI**
- 1549 The First Act of Uniformity
  - 1550-1551 John Hooper argues against vestments
  - 1552 The Second Act of Uniformity

### **1553-1558**

- MARY**
- 1553-1558 Many Christians executed
  - c1555 Two separated conventicles discovered

### **1558-1603**

- ELIZABETH I**
- 1559 The Third Act of Uniformity
  - 1560 The Geneva Bible
  - 1563 Puritans defeated at Convocation
  - 1567 Secret church at Plumber's Hall
  - 1567 Secret church at White-chapel Street with Richard Fitz as pastor
  - 1570 Thomas Cartwright lectures on Acts at Cambridge
  - 1571 Presbyterian congregation at Northampton
  - 1572 Wandsworth Presbytery
  - c1580 First Congregational church formed at Norwich with Robert Browne as pastor
  - 1588-1589 The Marprelate Tracts
  - 1590s William Perkins at Cambridge
  - 1592 The Ancient church formed in London with Francis Johnson as pastor
  - 1593 Henry Barrowe, John Greenwood and John Penry hanged
  - 1593 The Ancient church emigrates to Amsterdam
  - c1602 Congregational church formed at Gainsborough

*List of Dates*

**1603-1625 JAMES I**

- 1603 The Millenary Petition
- 1604 Hampton Court Conference
- 1604 Three hundred Puritans ejected from the Church of England
- c1604 Gainsborough church divides into two, one at Scrooby
- 1604 John Robinson joins Scrooby church and becomes teacher
- 1606 John Smyth joins church at Gainsborough and becomes pastor
- 1606-1607 Gainsborough church emigrates to Amsterdam
- 1608 Scrooby church emigrates to Amsterdam
- 1609 Scrooby church moves to Leyden. John Robinson becomes pastor
- 1609 First General Baptist church formed in Amsterdam with John Smyth as pastor
- 1611 The Authorised King James Version of the Bible
- 1611-1612 First General Baptist church formed in England with Thomas Helwys as pastor
- 1616 First Independent church formed at Southwark with Henry Jacob as pastor
- 1620 Leyden (Scrooby) church emigrates to New World

**1625-1649 CHARLES I**

- 1633-1641 Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury
- 1633-1638 First Particular Baptist church formed
- 1640 Long Parliament begins
- 1642 First Particular Baptist church formed with baptism by immersion. Richard Blunt as pastor
- 1642 First Civil War starts
- 1643-1649 The Westminster Assembly
- 1644 First Particular Baptist Confession of Faith